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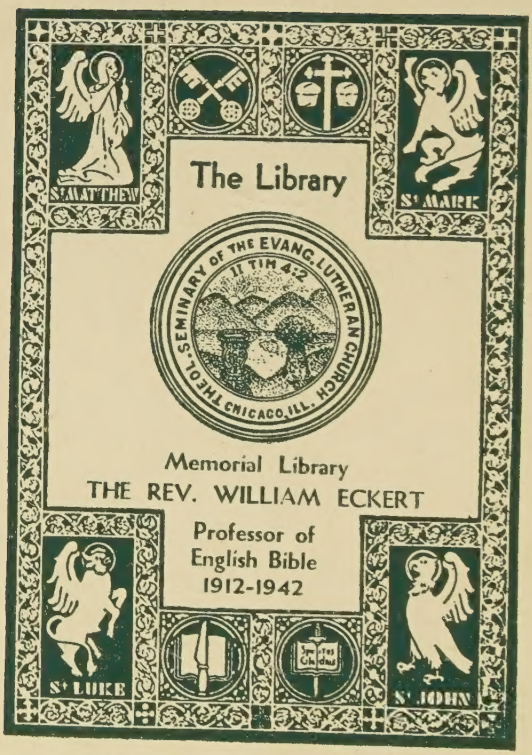
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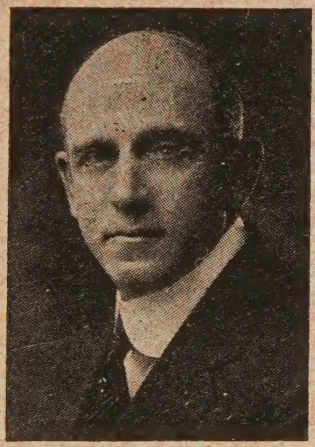

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Dr. Atkins was awarded the Church Peace and Union Prize for an essay on International Peace and has contributed to various religious journals. He has published a substantial list of books, including an examination of modern religious cults and movements and a study of confessional literature.

REINSPECTING VICTORIAN RELIGION

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PILGRIMS OF THE LONELY ROAD
MODERN RELIGIOUS CULTS AND MOVEMENTS
THE GODWARD SIDE OF LIFE
THE MAZE OF THE NATIONS
THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY
CRAFTSMEN OF THE SOUL

REINSPECTING VICTORIAN RELIGION

A Back to Normal Critique

Being the Samuel Harris Lectures on Literature and Life Given at Bangor Theological Seminary in Nineteen Hundred and Twenty-eight

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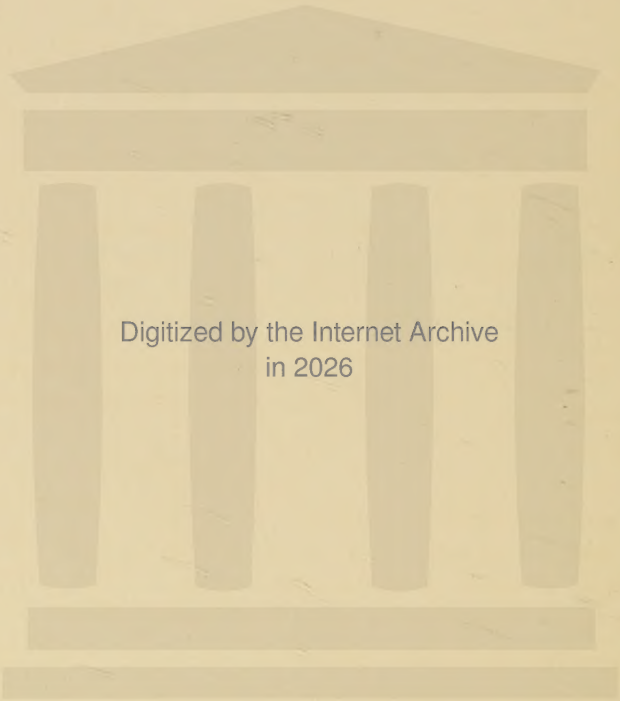
TO

DR. LYNN HAROLD HOUGH

Minister of the American Church in Montreal

In Whom Literature and Life Have Achieved

a Luminous and Inspiring Comradeship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PREFACE

THE lectures herein contained were given before the Faculty, students and friends of Bangor Theological Seminary through the fine courtesy of the President and Faculty. The assigned subject of the lectureship is Literature and Life, and the memory of Samuel Harris, to whom three generations of students and preachers have been deeply in debt, is kept and honored in the foundation. The theme determines the line and application of the lectures; they must begin with literature and somewhere reach and touch life. No lecturer could ask for more ample frontiers within which to move.

I chose to consider two Victorian poets, Browning and Tennyson, not altogether because they were the natural choice of a mind which, I begin to suspect, is itself Victorian, nor because they have long been preachers' poets, but because they are more deeply saturated with a feeling for the religious side of life, in a richer and more penetrating way than any other English poets, and because the finest distillation of life in literature is always found in poetry. Of course there is purely religious poetry aplenty; fugitive song winged with devotion and spiritual understanding. But these two men be-

tween them brought a range and depth of thought and feeling to the spiritual interpretation of life which I think cannot be matched in any poetry.

What they have done has a timeless value and ought not to be lost in some general prejudice of our own time against the age to which they belong. I found myself as I went along compelled to consider, in some general way, the sources of our feeling about their time and its way and whether this feeling was just. The title under which the lectures were really given was "The Drama of Life and Two Victorians," but the publishers found another, and I think more telling title, though there is a discrepancy which needs some explaining between its arresting amplitude and the brief performance of the book.

The drama of life is as old and new as life itself. It involves the unfulfilled, the struggling and the baffled, the interplay of light and shadow across our roads and our souls and those final resolutions of all the strange elements of which we are compounded, in some issue of peace and power. Browning and Tennyson felt the drama and have voiced the acts and outcome of it in forms of beauty and truth, which have only to be considered to prove their commanding quality.

I have made a five-act drama out of certain of their poems chosen, I confess, to suit the purpose, but rich and right for all that. The drama begins with the prophecy of the unfulfilled and ends with

redemption, which is the way of life itself, if it go on bravely to a victorious issue. I venture to hope that any actor in the aforesaid drama who may read this little book will find the help and light the writer himself has found in a long comradeship with two great singers who have enriched literature with their cadenced interpretations of the meaning of life, and shown in their own lives how nobly the action may be carried through.

GAIUS GLENN ATKINS

Huntington House
Auburn Theological Seminary
March the Thirtieth
Nineteen Hundred Twenty-Eight

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REINSPECTING VICTORIAN RELIGION

REINSPECTING VICTORIAN RELIGION

Chapter One

THE PROPHECY OF THE UNFULFILLED

—CLEON

There are signs amongst us of some awakening public interest in the Victorian epoch. They are both slight and fugitive but significant. A biography may now be profitably advertised as a picture of that particular period. Collectors are cautiously turning their attention to its furniture and, what is very much more to the point, it is being served by the quick flight of time; we begin already to see it through the transforming perspective of the years. It will soon possess the timeless glamour which time alone can give. Once you have interposed a single generation between the present and the past, things seen in retrospect take on another quality.

It is little less than thirty years since the Prince of Wales telegraphed to the Lord Mayor of London, "My beloved Mother, the Queen, has just passed away, surrounded by her children and grandchildren." But her grandson is now king and the reign of King Edward has become a kind of translucent

curtain through which to see the long administration of his mother. We, who have coined the term Victorian, and used it in a mocking way, do not see clearly enough that we have made it classic. The death of the last of the actors who played any part upon that great stage has contributed to our more serious reappreciation of it. You do not properly respect any stage as long as some gray, bent actor of the old troupe plays a lingering part, but when the stage is peopled wholly with shadows it acquires the grave dignity which death and memory combine to create. The dead and gone have a strange power to compel our respect. We may strip them of the tinsel with which their own time clothed them, but what was right and true begins to emerge—and endures.

There has been time, now, for time to do its work. It is ninety years since Alexandrina Victoria became queen. Her earlier ministers are now names in history books and engraved on bronze statues under the shadows of the towers of the Houses of Parliament and the Abbey, wondering a little perhaps to find a sad-faced, backwoodsman from Illinois seated amongst them. The rivalry of Disraeli and Gladstone is over these fifty years. It is almost seventy years since Darwin published the *Origin of Species,* and eighty years since Tennyson finished *In Memorian.* We might profitably listen to their voices now as we listen to other voices time has made august.

There is no denying, however, that we are still far from any undue idealization of the Victorian. On the contrary, to call anything Victorian is still to condemn it—though not now quite without benefit of clergy. The complex, to use an un-Victorian phrase, which the period suggests, has become standardized. The people of that time wore far too many clothes and never counted calories; women fainted and blushed. Victorians lived in houses with too much outside adornment and with too many unrestful furnishings. They loved draperies and curious creations in wax under glass covers. Indeed, there was a curious habit of waxing life and keeping it under glass.

Such as these lived decorous and passionless lives, marrying early, nurturing their family in godly, righteous and sober ways, being in the end gathered blamelessly to their fathers.

It is easier to draw a picture like this than to analyze the secret of our reaction against it all. We are inclined, I suppose, to find in Victorianism an irritating combination of too much and too little: too much upholstered furniture and too few comfortable chairs; too many clothes and too little freedom in wearing them; too many curved lines and too few straight approaches; too much waxed innocence and too little sophistication; too many ideals and not enough actual insight; too many time-worn formulas and too little grip on reality. Such things as these easily lend themselves to caricature, and

since caricature is always a convenient tool for cynicism we, of a disillusioned and somewhat cynical age, have made the utmost use of it.

Besides, a deal of water, much of it deeply tinged with red, has run under the bridge since the last thirty years of the nineteenth century. Our nineteenth century and our own generation have been carried swiftly into an intensity of experience against which the placid twilight of a vanished age seems empty of any real experience at all. What can they know of life, these self-satisfied folk of fifty years ago, who never heard the drone of an aeroplane in the sky or drumfire against the horizon, who never caught a voice out of the viewless air or stepped upon the accelerator of a sixty-horse power motor car?

There may be also an unconscious element of envy in our very appraisals of them. Since we have been baptized so deeply into dramatic intensities of experience and eventually found no peace therein, nor, as yet, any hidden wealth of life commensurate with the experiences, we are inclined to make a virtue, not exactly of what we have missed but of what somehow cheats us, and, accounting our restlessness for righteousness, pity their poor estate who managed to be righteous without being too restless; escaping the dilemma by wondering whether they were righteous at all and whether it was not a matter of wax under glass.

I

Of course, the war contributed to this temper, coloring our interpretations of the past as it colored everything else. This is rather strikingly illustrated by a very clever essay on the general wrongness of the Victorians which a very clever magazine published during the war. The crux of the whole matter came out there plainly enough; the real trouble with our spiritual and intellectual forbears was that they were far too idealistic. They had dreamt and sung of a friendly and warless world, and had a way of dipping into the future with a confident vision, which ranged beyond aerial battles toward a happier time,

> When the war drum throbbed no longer, and the battle flag was furled,
> In the parliament of men, the federation of the world.

And I do not know any better measure of the distance which separates us from them than the cynical amusement with which we listen to this quotation, if we hear it quoted at all, and that in spite of the fact that the man who sang it foresaw "the nations' airy navies grappling in the central blue" before there was ever an aeroplane. Ten years ago we had no patience with this sort of thing, since the battle-flags were anything but furled and our main concern was to carry through a tragic business, though it involved the wreck of long-held idealisms. Indeed,

as if it were not enough to have the idealisms wrecked by the massive shock of circumstance, we went out of our way to wreck them ourselves, and held a little with bitter scorn the men who had dared ever to entertain them.

The psychology of all this is natural enough. Cynicism is always born of the travail of disillusioned dreamers, and a time whose vision is clouded has naturally no use for a time whose vision is clear, even if it be impracticable. So whether we approach Victorianism from the outside and make a caricature of its gowns and Prince Albert coats, or approach it from within and make a complaint of its too-facile idealisms, it has been long, as time goes now, out of our good favor. And yet there are not wanting those amongst us who are beginning to question the finality of our judgments. Victorian furniture is just what it used to be, but it begins to command a price in antique shops.

And when we begin to compare both its spiritual and intellectual qualities with aspects of our own time we are not so comfortably sure that the comparison is all in our favor. There is solid ground for believing the disciplined liberal mind of the eighties and nineties to have been, perhaps, the soundest and best political mind of the last two centuries. The men who made that great age are now long enough dead for us to begin to see the commanding contours of what they were and did and sought. What is soundest and best amongst us now in the regions

of humanitarianism, political method, education and machinery of justice is their creation. Every generation releases new forces and must follow its own gleam, but the ground stuff upon which we are now working is so largely the contribution of the Victorian that our criticism should, at least, be tempered with gratitude. Nor should our impatience with his romanticism blind us to the enormous intellectual force of the Victorian leaders in science, politics and letters. As their biographies become literature, we have the uneasy feeling that we will have far too little to match them when our own biographies come to be written.

I venture to believe that the historians of the future, with a juster retrospect, will see that the great Victorians took the drive of new forces upon old positions with a gallant courage and a power of constructive adjustment equal at least to ours. We do, I think, see a little more clearly than they saw, the far-reaching issues and the staggering difficulty of the strife in which our inherited order—and theirs—is involved. It takes a long time for movements which begin high up and far off to work down to the man in the street, but the difficulty of readjustment is none the less real to the lonely great on the far heights.

Life was not altogether easy, even in the comparatively tranquil afternoon of the nineteenth century. There was a sense amongst the prescient of gathering storms. The impact of industrialism upon

the order Victorian England inherited left its mark, and a deep one, upon the whole period. In England particularly a long-established social and economic order was recast in two generations to an extent, I think, unparalleled in the history of any ancient state. When we consider how this was done, without revolution and without too much violence, with a commanding respect for law and individual liberty and generally in such ways as to advance human well-being, a certain measure of respect is due the men who managed it.

They took the first drive of science upon religion and criticism upon tradition. They kept their faith as stoutly as we have kept ours, and the wisest and most far-seeing of them indicated general directions of readjustment which we still follow gratefully. We have now a range of knowledge they did not possess, but I do not see that, in our effort to maintain the spiritual order and defend immemorial hopes, we have added anything to their strategy. We are misled generally, I think, by failing to understand how old some new things are, and that, though our struggles are very real to us, they were no less real to those who cannot clearly tell us from their dust what they bore or how they conquered.

If there was a radical fault in the Victorian attitude toward life, it was in an excessive confidence that the victory had already been won. There were amongst them men whose facile and commanding power, and whose very excess of confidence, led them to underestimate the slow and costly struggle

upon which Western civilization was entering, and the haunting possibilities of miscarriage in that struggle. They saw evolution first and the vision thrilled them as the old explorers must have been thrilled when they first saw the shore lines of the New World, or the illimitable blue of an unvoyaged sea. It is one thing to discover a continent and quite another to subdue it to a full wealth of human use, but the explorer is not to be blamed because he believes his task done when he has found his long-desired haven. Nor do I believe a careful examination of the Victorian mind will show its scientists, statesmen, scholars and poets to have so largely underestimated the complexities and disappointments just down the horizon, as we commonly assume.

They had their own sense of both the cost and intensity of the human struggle, and I am going to bring two witnesses, both from the region of poetry, to substantiate this statement, and ask you to consider how two Victorians conceived the drama of life, its action and ultimate outcome. I do this not through any desire to set the Victorian back upon his pedestal, but to discover what permanent understanding the two greatest English-speaking poets of the last one hundred years had of life and its issues.

II

A poet should be in some fine, true way a better interpreter of his own time than any of his comrades. He is never independent of the time spirit, but he is

never its slave either. He approaches it at his best on the level of easy comradeship, as though to say to the time spirit, "You and I have many things in common, and you are likely a thousand years from now to be better known through me than any of the rest about us here. There should be between us, therefore, a very perfect understanding, and if you will trust me with your secret you may be very sure I will deal honestly with you."

A poet does not always sing about his own time, though he always sings out of it; for though he tell of great fighting about topless towers of Ilium when the warriors are all dust, he tells the story from the point of his own time and not of times vanished. Tennyson, I think, is a better illustration of that than blind Homer. He took needless pains to retell the tales of King Arthur and his knights, but for all that he did not escape making his knights out of his fellow mid-Victorians by the mere substitution of armor for a Prince Albert coat, with the Prince Consort of blessed memory at the head of the table, nothing being much changed except Guinevere's unfortunate infidelities. The *Iliad,* therefore, is more useful to reveal what they thought about the Trojan war when the Trojan war was a memory, than to help us understand how they felt about it when it was really going on. The *Idylls of the King* are more useful as a Victorian definition of chivalry than as a veracious representation of either the manners or the morals of King Arthur's court.

Mechanical things become vital beneath the poet's touch, and dead things come to life, and always some unexpected and imprisoned spirit finds a voice through his cadences. Or else he knows the soul of his world. He is as sensitive to its fears and hopes and embattled passions, to passions held in leash, and to overtones of happiness or pain or sorrow as the tube of your radio to ethereal vibration, and what is else unheard finds in him a voice.

He has, besides, a rare power of generalization, an alembic, as it were, in which a thousand ingredients are distilled to yield one potent spirit, which is both magic and a truth. He is also likely to be the dreamer of his time; the very sensitiveness of him to its faults begets his passion for their correction. His very power to dream discovers a happier state into which they may be resolved, and, since a poet is always a man of sound intellectual force, there is very likely to be a gritty realism in his ideals which the glamour of his speech and the perfect quality of his expression may somewhat obscure. You will take seriously the social anticipation of the sociologist, laboriously expressed, and dismiss the winged vision of the poet, when the poet's vision is all the time more true.

III

Thus we have long been taught when a poet is long enough dead to find in him the timeless voice of his own age. So Dante is the voice of twelve

silent centuries, and Milton the articulate expression of dead Puritanism seeking to recover, in some remote Paradise, what it had lost in the Commonwealth of Oliver Cromwell. And so Alfred Tennyson and Robert Browning are ways of approach to the very heart of a great time whose significance I venture to believe the future will again recover. They are splendidly complementary; they are inseparably associated and profoundly divided. Stopford Brook says that for sixty years these two poets occupied the two peaks of Apollo's Mount Parnassus, and though they might look across at one another and the world see them both there, there were between them differences so profound by every test as to constitute one of the most dramatic series of contrasts in the history of poetry.

Tennyson came early and into a very great popularity and kept it to the end. He had the face and carriage and even the proper hair of a poet. He wore a great soft hat and a long black cloak, lived in a cloud of tobacco smoke and warned inquisitive visitors away from Aldworth. He carried a title easily, but loved to move through the dusk. He was a dutiful poet laureate, lending distinction to a convention and singing the epithalamiums and threnodies of the Reigning House to the tearful satisfaction of the Queen.

He had not the look of an Englishman, but he was native to its soil and its ways to the last hidden fiber of his being. The flowers of England perfume

his songs; her brooks sing softly through his verses. He knew her cornfields and the footpaths across them, and he had no sure source of inspiration outside England and his own soul as England had made it. He was always the perfect artist and, though he sometimes failed in strength, he never failed in an art which more than once masked the actual weakness of his utterance. At his best he had a marvelous lyric quality; his worst was at least always intelligible and musical. He was philosopher enough, as we shall see presently, but his philosophy was always in solution, as a poet's philosophy should be, and when he finished it was always song.

Browning was everything Tennyson was not. There is some uncertainty about his racial inheritance, but some alien strain certainly modified his English descent. He has not the look of a poet as I see his picture on my study wall; his mouth is lost in his beard; his nose is strong and a bit fleshy—perhaps the clue to the alien strain is there. His eyes are a poet's eyes, but not entirely; his forehead is high and massive; his hair has something of the look of both poet and professor. He met people easily and loved to be amongst them. He might with a little help from the barber have passed for a business man. He was romantic enough, because he managed to make an idyllic episode of eloping with a middle-aged and invalided poetess, who was for him all that Beatrice had ever been for Dante, save that the perfect ideality of his love for her increased with

marriage, which might not have been true of Dante if he had married Beatrice.

He had an extraordinary range of intellectual interest and encyclopediac erudition. There are those who think his learning more clever than profound. He had in his youth the run of a library rich in unusual books, and he doubtless got from his reading odds and ends of information of which he afterwards made a considerable display. But there is a difference between erudition and scholarship. The erudite man knows a great deal about a great many things; he does not need to know everything about any one thing. Browning had besides a gift which only the greatest historians and poets possess, the power of feeling atmospheres and seeing old points of view, and of being able to put a thing in its proper setting so that it lives again as it used to live.

He moves through lands and epochs with so sure a touch that you would think him a cosmopolitan of a dozen reincarnations. You would hardly know him an Englishman at all, except now and then in his references to the English public, "which loved him not," or in a natural longing, of an unseasonably hot day in Florence, to be in England "now that April's there." He was exotic by English tests, but he knew Italy as well as Dante, and maybe better, seeing it with less embittered eyes. He was slow in finding a reading public and was as little affected by the fact as any poet who ever lived.

He belonged to no one time any more than to any one land, though very likely, through some strange sympathy of spirit, he would have been more at home in the Italy of the Renaissance than anywhere else. He belonged indeed most truly to the intricate and confused inwardness of the human soul. He took that for his province—any kind of soul—white, gray or black; a sinner's soul or a saint's soul; the soul of an Arab physician or a Greek dilettante upon an Ionian island or a monk in a monastery or a Renaissance artist; a lover's soul or the soul of an estranged wife; the soul of a casuistical bishop or of a Jew forced to hear a Christian sermon.

Browning's surest bid for a place among the immortals is just here. If he had not so long been the peculiar possession of those who, like myself, just now made lectures out of him, or used him to tag a sermon with an apt quotation, so putting him under suspicion from the modern intelligentsia, I think our own time with its flair for the psychological and the provocatively subtle would have "discovered" him and made a cult of their discovery. There are many Brownings and amongst them one who would have understood us acutely. He not only knew the confused inwardnesses but he made a stage of the soul and filled it with marvelous action; and though there is never but one actor—the man or woman who tells the story—the telling of it is like shadow fencing. You see only one rapier in play, but you guess the action of the unseen antagon-

ist from the thrusts and parries you do see. He needed no actors save doubt and fear, and love and unrepentant memory, and pride and avarice, stainless longing and sometimes the soul's own sense of its nearness to God. And he put them all in action in a monologue.

IV

Out of all this he made his song—sometimes as artist, sometimes as philosopher; sometimes both in perfect fusion, sometimes neither. This many-sidedness of the man is his fascination and the secret of all our despair in trying to read him. He can sing you as purely limpid a note as any Italian nightingale. He can lose you in a crabbed metaphysic which neither meter nor some arabesque of rhyme makes poetry, and he seems sometimes to take a wilful pleasure in contradictions and obscurities. But for all that he was the son of his century; that he could not escape. His characters belong to their time and place. He never makes a knight out of a Victorian gentleman by the mere device of changing his clothes, but his sense of life and its complexities and evolving problems is colored by the world of which he is a part. This is a hard matter to make plain; for illustration, we might say that Browning was in the way of being a free-church Christian. He never escaped his theological inheritance. The words which he puts upon the lips of the dying St. John in the desert—

> I say, the acknowledgment of God in Christ
> Accepted by the reason, solves for thee
> All questions in the earth and out of it
> And has so far advanced thee to be wise

—are fairly enough his own confession of faith. If, therefore, Karshish meets Lazarus and is thereby led to a strange wonder "whether the All-great is the All-loving too," and that God might somehow die for a man, it is after all Browning, the nineteenth-century Christian, who uses these words with a significance the Arab physician could never have given them.

Or, if Cleon asked to be remembered to one called Paulus, it is still Browning's St. Paul and not Cleon's the poet has in mind. The marvelous adeptness of it all, the incidental genius of the allusion, do not change that fact. Browning informs the souls of all those with whom he deals with a subjective intensity to which they themselves would naturally have been strange, since that was the poet's own inheritance and appropriation from his own time. This gives Browning a distinct significance for the preacher. He is not afraid of Christian words and phrases and allusions in his poetry, or to write about Christmas eve or Easter day or St. John in the desert or Lazarus come back with a strange reticence from the tomb. Preachers have read and quoted him for this, but the matter goes deeper. He has found his way into the hidden places of the human soul and a way out, which in the end is so parallel with the

Christian way as to make him of all great modern poets the most religiously quotable and usable.

He is always, as it were, having dealings with God; he feels deeply the shadowed side of life and from first to last is seeking some reconciliation of the white love of God and the black stain of sin.

> Is not God now i' the world His power first made?
> Is not His love at issue still with sin,
> Visibly when a wrong is done on earth?
> Love, wrong and pain, what see I else around?

The nineteenth century loved him, if it loved him at all, for his triumphant optimism, and was given to remarking casually that "God's in his heaven, All's right with the world." The twentieth century, being just now not quite so sure of either, is inclined to dismiss Browning's optimism as a robust combination of good health and happy disposition but otherwise having little bearing upon life, which is, I think, one of the secrets of our reaction against him.

What the twentieth century needs to take from Browning is not his optimism but his terribly searching analysis of the struggle. It does not need to take all the philosophy by which he resolved this struggle, much of that is obscure and some of it doubtful. When we come to the end of these lectures, we shall turn to Browning again for the secret of redemption, not, however, to the philosopher Browning, but rather to the Browning who, when he came to grips with the situation in which all evil

was entangled, saw at the dark heart of it the love-lit whiteness of the way by which all evil is transcended.

V

I have left myself little enough time in which to consider *Cleon* because, after all, *Cleon* does not need a great deal of time, being simply a song of disillusioned weariness and unsatisfied longing and some sense of great destiny. The song is placed, if its place matters, upon a little island lying like a lily in the Ionian Sea. Cleon is a contemporary of St. Paul, and so the poem dates itself. It is a letter written by a Greek poet to a princely protector who has sent him rich gifts and some questions as to what death may signify, and whether there is anything beyond it.

You may linger over the poem if you will for its lovely picturing of a little harbor and a galley which has dropped her sails and piled up gifts upon a marble wharf, of a low marble house washed with the sunset and a woman "in her crocus vest woven of sea-wools." Our concern is not with that, nor even entirely with the rather closely woven argument of the poem. Cleon rather overestimates himself, but even so he represents the ripe and inclusive culture of his time—a time for which art and beauty had done their perfect best—a paganism so mellow in its ripening as to hide the rottenness that lay behind it.

I do not want to press anything here save to remind you that this is still the nineteenth century speaking through the first. Browning was not strange himself to the mellow ripeness of a great culture, though whether or not he knew the tide of his own time was so near the turn he has never told us. But there is in Cleon, for all that, Browning's own testimony to something in a man's soul which art and beauty can never satisfy. Paulus could have told Cleon if they had sat together on Cleon's portico what was the matter with him and his time and where the cure was. The cure was beyond Cleon, but he felt the lassitude of his own spiritual sickness as well as the sharp edge of his own unfilled desire. He knows that a thing ended is done and, unless there be some unsensed way of growth still to be entered upon, he and his time were finished and all the perfect beauty of their accomplishments but one more monument to their futility.

Here is the deep entanglement of all life. An age—or an individual—may finish its turn in mellow beauty or in sordid ugliness, but unless there be a purpose beyond all seen and sensed accomplishments it looks out across waters washed by the sunset, with puzzlement and frustration.

> And thus our soul, mis-known, cries out to Zeus
> To vindicate his purpose in our life.

(Though we cry out to God and not to Zeus.) Here in one single line the poetry, the philosophy, the

passion of Robert Browning break through. "Why stay we on the earth unless to grow?"

This is Browning's understanding of life put into a sentence, and everything else comes out of it. Careful students of the poet, and very notably Henry—now Sir Henry—Jones, have noted Browning's emphasis upon the central significance of the moral struggle. It is the only thing which gives life any meaning at all for him. Evil is the opportunity for the struggle, the challenge to it. The moral combatant may not be sure even whether what he struggles against is shadow or substance till he touches it with his spear, and maybe not even then. The main thing is the moral fight itself. He would not even have death end that; it is

> Speed on, fight on, fore ever
> There as here . . .

Without this element of moral struggle man is worth nothing at all. Life begins with the fight.

> No, when the fight begins within himself,
> A man's worth something, God stoops o'er his head,
> Satan looks up between his feet—both tug—
> He's left, himself, i' the middle: the soul wakes
> And grows.

Browning is not greatly concerned about the essential discomfort of a man caught in a tug of war between God and the devil. His tragedy would be not to be so caught, which brings us back to Cleon again, who knew only the strain of it as he saw the

sunset wash his gifts with gold, and foresaw another sunset, more final, leave to the twilight other gifts more precious.

VI

Cleon tests his life by the recognized tests of his own time. He has been rich in experience and accomplishment; there was always the lyric woman in her crocus vest bearing a cup in her two white hands, and there had been poems besides and pictures and proper tribute to his genius; but these were not enough. Zeus had finished man's creation by putting a fire in his bones which would not let him rest. The trouble really is the insistence of the soul which wants everything and still refuses to be satisfied. By the tests of this unquenchable hunger of the soul any accomplishment becomes so small a thing; there is always in the soul of a man the protest and the prophecy of the unfulfilled.

I do not know whether or not Browning ever started anywhere with one single premise upon which he built a single logically derived system; he has a way of starting from so many points of departure; what unity there is in him is rather in his points of arrival. But I do think that, if we are to set out from any one point of departure to find what life and its issues are, and why we are compelled to set out at all and what all our travail and our strivings mean, we should find it here—"we who see the wider but to sigh the more"—and know more

clearly than Browning's own self-confident time knew how "most progress is most failure." And yet if this be true we are hopelessly entangled. If we have no business upon the earth but just to grow, and yet "if most progress is most failure," something is wrong.

It cannot be the premise. Browning was surer of that than of anything else in the world, and so I think are we. The trouble must be then with our understanding of progress and the goals which we have set for ourselves. We have built our own labyrinths and grope through their passages. Who but a guide from God can set us free? And even if we were set free, have we time enough in this present life to make the journey? These are the questions Cleon asks, and here Christianity meets Cleon. It accepts from him the prophecy of the unfulfilled, the restlessness of the incomplete. There are aspects of this entanglement with which Browning deals strongly in other poems, and with which "one called Paulus" was strangely familiar, which do not appear in *Cleon*. He is, after all, an epicurean, as are many amongst us, who has accomplished the fine art of living the life of the senses with restraint and balance, but yet never with satisfaction. He has not been compelled to cry, "O wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from the body of this death?"

But, since he has won so much, his sense of what he misses is perhaps after all the more arresting.

Cleon thus caught between the contradictions of our humanity—"Why stay we on the earth unless to grow?" and "Most progress is most failure"—had a dream once, so he tells us, that Zeus to whom he cried to vindicate his purpose in our life

> descended here
> And, once for all, showed simultaneously
> What, in its nature, never can be shown,
> Piecemeal or in succession:—showed, I say,
> The worth both absolute and relative
> Of all his children from the birth of time,
> His instruments for all appointed work.

Paulus could have told him that it was not a dream; it is thus the deliverance for the entangled soul begins.

Tennyson felt much more keenly than Browning the implications of evolution. He was deeply moved by the anticipation of some splendor of corporate destiny, an expectation which shows but dimly through Browning, if it shows at all. Browning's interests are vividly concrete. He saw men, it is true, under the category of the Eternal, but he saw them one by one, and each with some gleam he had darkened or some smoking wick he had blown into flame. He loved that figure and applied it to his own art. He could in *The Ring and the Book* make a fire of an old ash-mantled matter through which he felt some pristine heat—but the spark must be there to begin with.

So, with the soul. That is God's spark; we kindle or quench it after our fashions, but the spark is there—divinely prophetic. More than that a man must feel it there, and a more careful study of Browning's men and women than is here possible will show them somehow classified by their own conscious relation to that spark. In some of them it has gone out—pride or passion or greed has put it out. Some are saddened by the sense of its low estate within them. Others have worthily nursed it into some deathless warmth and light. Cleon, by such tests as these, has an especial meaning for our own time.

I do not mean that we are being taught the saving homesickness of the soul, as Cleon was, through the perfection of our art and the mellow beauty of our culture; but there are parallels for all that. Browning, who had a way which few have shared with him of understanding the spirit of old, dead times, has set *Cleon's* saving dissatisfaction in a jeweled setting. Here, he says, is the perfect ripeness of beauty on lovely islands washed by azure seas; here is the perfect enjoyment of all the senses can ask or give, held in artistic restraint, and here is an aching emptiness which beauty only makes more poignant. The tides which carry it toward oblivion are the gentlest tides of all the seas, but oblivion is imminent. Now, because there was so much to lose, the losing of it was so much the more pain:

In this, that every day my sense of joy
Grows more acute, my soul (intensified
By power and insight) more enlarged, more keen;
While every day my hairs fall more and more,
My hand shakes, and the heavy years increase—
The horror quickening still from year to year,
The consummation coming past escape
When I shall know most, and yet least enjoy—
When all my works wherein I prove my worth,
Being present still to mock me in men's mouths,
. . . . . .
I, I the feeling, thinking, acting man,
The man who loved his life so over-much,
Sleep in my urn.

The cry of a dying civilization is there, so much the more moving because of what it issues from. The poet does not mean that failure to dishearten us, but only to show us that nothing is enough save God and timeless life. The very emptiness of an existence so perfect as Cleon's is the sign that we are made for something better, the very beauty of it a protest against its hopeless dissolution.

It needs no great change to make that lesson ours. Change mellows beauty to the vast complexities of an industrial civilization; for art take power and technical ingenuity—and art besides; for low, marble houses substitute tall ones whose tops repeat the pyramids and Gothic spires; change galleys to ocean liners and the gifts of a generous prince to the commerce of the nations; and, still, against such stupendous background, the needs of a humanity whose

divine discontents none of these things can satisfy show more compellingly.

Paulus has spoken now for two thousand years, and Cleon's hope of the God-sent revelation is not a dream, but there is still in the soul of man a prophecy unfulfilled, created to realize itself through struggle in a wealth of character informed of God, perfected in love and completed in the Eternal. That is Robert Browning's message to his time and ours. The soul is always there, unsatisfied, entangled. The drama of life is to free it and fulfill its divine destiny.

Chapter Two

THE ENTANGLED SOUL—*IDYLLS OF THE KING*

If names were everything, we should not look to any idyll for light upon the soul's entanglements. Idylls do not suggest entanglements; they rather suggest meadows and farmhouses and the drone of bees through the clover and a happy aloofness from the fret of life. What have the entanglements of the soul to do with Horace on his Sabine farm? But names are not everything, the *Idylls of the King* being anything but idyllic; and if Tennyson had given this particular group of poems another name they would be no better for it—and no worse.

Moreover, the *Idylls* are not now highly considered by Tennyson's critics. He was at his best on the lyric side, though the delicate allure of his little song seems ill matched with the massive physical force of the man, or with his massive intellectual force. And yet, very likely this is to mistake the whole matter. A lyric may cost more sheer hard work than an epic; it is at least a finer distillation of the poetic genius, and Tennyson had a rare genius for the long lingering over a single line which gives it wings to escape "the dark background and abysm of time." He had nothing of Browning's dangerous

gift of precipitate composition. A deal of Browning's fault, I suspect, was due to the fact that it was very easy for him to write, and being always like a nebula, much a-swirl with all sorts of great things not yet resolved into systems, he had a way of throwing out his suns and stars before they were finished.

Tennyson held his matter longer in solution. "That line," he said, either half chanting it in a deep-voiced way, as he loved to do, or else touching it, printed, with the long stem of his churchwarden pipe, "cost me seven pipes." There have been many ways of measuring time, but Tennyson is apparently the only reputable authority who has ever measured time by the consumption of tobacco. Which is only another way of saying, seriously, that he took the utmost pains with his work, turned it over and over in his mind, and never let a thing go until it was done to suit him.

I

In general this is all to the good. He is rarely obscure and generally wonderfully clear; and sometimes the very clearness of his lines mask their depths. Browning's hasty carelessness in writing has been too often accounted unto him for philosophic profundity. "Here," the reader has said, "is something I cannot possibly understand; there must be, therefore, a great deal in it." Plenty of Browning clubs, and I suspect a deal of writing about

Browning, have this genesis. On the other hand, one may far too easily say of Tennyson, "Here is something I understand perfectly; there cannot be a very great deal in it," when, all the while, it may have philosophies at the heart of it. Since Augustine first raised, against Palagius, the difficult question of man's will and God's will, the theologian and the philosopher too have found enough therein to make a great chapter in human thought; and, if we try to read them at all, we are deeply impressed by their wisdom. But if Tennyson says,

> Our wills are ours, we know not how,
> Our wills are ours to make them Thine,

we call it poetry and fail to see perhaps how finally he has summed up the controversy of the centuries.

Now even a poet would not say a thing like that unless he had himself considered what lay behind it as carefully as the theologian. Somewhere behind all Tennyson's poetry is a meditative concentration of an extraordinarily acute mind, upon aspects of life and destiny essentially more profound than not a little of Browning's subject matter. Tennyson works slowly, delivers his insights and understandings perhaps too delicately and briefly phrased, and was upon his own confession greatly handicapped by something to write about.

"I can always write," he said, "when I can see my subject whole." The difficulty was now and again to get a subject. A critic might find in this con-

fession a key to certain limitations in Tennyson. Browning never had any trouble in finding things to write about; the range of his themes is unequaled in poetic literature. Shakespeare had no trouble in finding things to write about. One of the differences between a great mind of absolutely the first order and a fine mind of the second rank is just here. There is an unfailing fecundity in creative minds of the first order which is wanting in the ranks below. Artists and musicians are subject to the same test. Rembrandt found a subject for a picture in every face he saw on the street. If he chose his faces at all, he chose them not for unusual beauty but for some suggestion of time-worn and care-worn humanity—and the world is full of that. You may contrast Millais and Rembrandt by just this test. Millais painted a picture a year and spent months on a vine-grown wall; the great galleries are rich in the somber splendor of Rembrandt's brush. I am not so sure of music, but there would certainly be in Beethoven the kind of universal openness, whatever that means in terms of musical composition, to sources and suggestions which the musician of the second or third order does not possess.

Very likely the secret of it all is on the inside as well as the outside. The creator of absolutely the first rank, Beethoven, Shakespeare, Balzac, Rembrandt, Michelangelo, has an immensely fecund interior energy which must spend itself, which sees everywhere the chance and the challenge, and is there-

fore more nearly akin to the creative energy of the Divine than anything else in our humanity. A torrential energy like this is not unusually self-critical; it is nobly sure of itself through the very rightness of its force and genius. Browning can never have been a demanding self-critic. He, too, had the divine confidence in the drive of his own creative power, and yet there was wanting somewhere, sometimes, a controlling genius which unfailingly subdued the creative afflatus to poetic perfection. If Browning had possesed this gift also, he would have belonged to the lonely group of the supremely great.

Tennyson's slow, brooding way of composition implies some excess of critical faculty. It made it difficult, also, for him to find things to write about. He always fancied himself as a dramatist and misdirected a very precious energy in writing plays which are neither good dramas nor good poetry. He was not, according to his own testimony, a slow worker when his matter had finally taken shape in his own mind, but he wrote only after a long period of gestation, and his total output is hardly commensurate either with the length of his life or his genius.

Toward his middle period he considered and dismissed a good many possible themes, returning finally to the Arthurian legend. He approached the subject first in 1833, and Arthur Benson thinks his original conception of the cycle to have been more mystical than the poems themselves turned out to be. He had undoubtedly some thought of finding

in them a symbolic representation of the warfare of the soul.

In the Epilogue of the *Idylls* he prays the Queen to

> Accept this old imperfect tale
> New-old and a shadowing Sense at war with Soul
> Rather than that gray King, whose name, a ghost,
> Streams like a cloud, man-shaped,—from mountain peak,
> And cleaves to Cairn and Cromlech still.

But either because he had not the genius to give a sustained mystical interpretation to so long a poem, or else because he was somewhat oppressed with a sense of responsibility as poet laureate and felt compelled to find a consoling resemblance between King Arthur and the Prince Consort, or else because, as Benson suggests, he lost his first, higher purpose in the tales themselves and in the delineation of character, the *Idylls* missed his earlier purpose.

Critics also, since the glamour of Tennyson's name has faded a bit, have been inclined to find in the whole cycle an overelaboration of a rather thin material. The *Idylls* belong both to a world and a time in which Tennyson was not entirely at home. Such things as these, the critics have said, are best left to Malory and the historian. Edward Arlington Robinson has, I think, in *Tristram* done a finer piece of work than Tennyson in any of the *Idylls* save the first and the last. But for all that the *Idylls* are not a failure even if they preach too many sermons. And

there is running through them some subtle suggestion of entanglement which a moralist may use to find a moving light upon man's warfare in an unfriendly world, and of the issues of the conflict.

II

We are following, as it were, a road to which Browning has already directed us. He was on his side deeply conscious of the complicated issues of life. There is always in the human spirit some prophecy of the unfulfilled. We are here to grow or else we are here for nothing at all, and our progress in so many directions seems destined to self-defeat. There is in the whole human enterprise a tragic power to undo its own creations. We have built our cities and adorned them with beauty and magnificence, and then, as if time were not alone enough for them to stand against, we have taken and sacked them in our wars till only their pathetic ruins are left, out of which presently we gather this or that fragment of vanished beauty and shelter it in a museum.

We seem unable to endure our own prosperities, and always, when a great culture has reached the hour of its rare fruition, it is ruined by some action of humanity itself, and we remember only the wonder of it as a thing undone and lost. If the individual himself does not defeat his own promise, death ends it for him, and we are thus brought face to face with what, I suppose, is more plain and more

perplexing in our human estate than anything else. There is within us some fire, some force, some passion, some urgent sense of vast destiny, call it what you will, to which the order of which we are a part is not kind. The solutions of this discrepancy in which all our discontents, divine or earth-stained, are rooted are as various as human insight and ingenuity.

The Greeks, who pondered much upon the strangeness of the tragic issue of life so alien to their sun-lit land and sun-lit souls, had no name for it but fate. There was, they believed, a vast and awesome necessity to which men and gods are subject and against which all struggle is futile. The name which they gave it in their own tongue has a sound as of a chain dragging its links over stone; the very word awakens the echo of the inevitable. It was after all only a name for the impenetrable darkness in which the roots of destiny are planted, the answer of fatalism to the questing soul.

The philosopher says that our entanglement is the unescapable price of conscious life. Bergson maintains something like this in *Creative Evolution.* There is, he says, a constant opposition between matter and consciousness, as though the current of consciousness has flowed down into matter as into a tunnel seeking a way through. In many directions consciousness has found an impasse; it has found a thoroughfare only in instinct and human intelligence. An ant and a man are the two termini of the

drive of the conscious upon the unconscious, but the ant is finished and man is only begun. The effortless perfection of instinct is its own undoing. The perfect adaption of means to end signifies that the end is reached with no possibility of any further growth. The very restlessnesses and perplexities of human intelligence are the price of its power to conquer new worlds and adjust itself to new conditions. For every need which it satisfies it creates a new need, and so, instead of closing as does instinct, the circle of action in which the animal moves automatically, it opens for its own activity an infinite field, the boundaries of which it constantly enlarges.[1]

We have thus won our humanity at the price of a tormenting self-consciousness and a haunting sense of being alien to the order to which we belong; otherwise we would not be human. We attain separateness only through knowing that we are different, and we often ache with the knowledge. It is the price we pay for life, and life is doubtless worth it; but it is more than useless to try to justify it by any idealistic tests or to expect any escape from the common fate of all transitory things, which have perhaps this advantage over us, that, being transitory, they do not know it. Such as these expect no outcome at all except the end and would say, I suppose, that this restlessness of ours, this sense of being entangled, is only a trick of the life force, whatever that means, to hold us bravely to the

[1] Bergson, *L'Évolution Créatrice*, page 153.

struggle, being necessary to any persistence at all in the brief and foredoomed conflict; otherwise we should surrender to begin with.

The pessimist goes a step farther down this depressing road and says that even the struggle is useless. We have been cast up out of the common, impersonal order of things by some strange caprice beyond our power to understand. The pessimistic historian allows something to the individual. There may be gleams of sunshine in his brief day but the race is for the dark. Humanity is born to grow old and to die. You might as well challenge the stars in their courses as this law of our decadence. Cleon on his lily isle considered for a moment whether some consolation for the brevity of the individual life might not be found in the corporate creations of humanity; the art enduring though the artist died, but Henry Adams and time would not allow Cleon even that dubious consolation. Only fragments are left of all the loveliness which crowned the shores of Cleon's sea; the art and the artist are both gone.

Robert Browning parts company sharply with the pessimist just at the point of the struggle. He admits the struggle but he glories in it; he is passionately sure of the outcome but he does believe that the doom which compels us to fight is our salvation. If only a man gets a good fight out of it all on moral levels it makes no great difference whether his foes are substance or shadow; indeed, as we have noted, he thinks it better we should not know. If

we knew they were substance, we should despair of the issue; if we knew they were shadow, we would not unsheath our swords.

III

Others still have accepted a hopeless dualism. There are, they tell us, two embattled orders between which there is no reconciliation, and a man belongs to both of them, or else they both use him for a battlefield. They are light and darkness, good and evil, sense and soul. There has been no general agreement among dualists as to what is finally going to happen. The more consistent of them have foreseen a universe endlessly at war with itself in its higher and lower elements, and man, the little cosmos, at the center of it all and doomed to bear the strain as best he may.

The difference, I think, between these and those who tell us that we delude ourselves in giving significance to the struggle, is that even the despairing dualist recognizes light and love and goodness somewhere, if only one could reach their sovereign domain and become a citizen thereof. Others still believe it possible for a man to fight his way through and finally emerge in the light. Others again, and I think St. Augustine found this way out of the dualism with which he began, believe some favored few are spiritually plucked by the sovereign will of God out of the order of darkness and moral anarchy, those not thus saved having been foredoomed from all eternity. Which is on the whole the most unsat-

isfactory solution ever proposed, except for those who are saved, and I should think they would take no great joy in their salvation.

Our own adjustment is taking a more concrete line. We leave to philosophers the rather difficult relation of self-conscious existence to its environmental order, and to theologians the reconciliation of God's sovereign and man's embattled will, and find our world, though not entirely comfortable, strangely adapted to what Henry Churchill King calls the struggle for character, and ourselves with equipment enough to carry the struggle through victoriously if only we use what force we possess of thought and affection and purpose, as it was meant to be used.

Our tragedy is to have wasted our high equipment upon so many lesser ends. Certain outstanding aspects of the struggle have from the first commanded the attention of the thoughtful, and naturally the least subtle have arrested us first. Christianity is, of course, entirely rooted, as are all religions more or less, in the necessity and issue of this struggle and meets it all with its scheme of redemption. The emerging ethic and spiritual insight of Christianity found its first concrete entanglement in the thrust of Christian ethic and spiritual passion against the solicitations of the senses. The pagan world generally made no conflict of this at all. Paganism at its worst surrendered to sense without a struggle. The paganism of Cleon had no quarrel with the senses but

sought to sublimate them in creative devotion to beauty, and to live on their higher levels. Stoicism met them with a resolute affirmation of the lonely supremacy of the spirit, and faced the shadow and stain of these time elements of our mortality as something a proud and brave man may escape by establishing himself in the inviolable citadel of his own soul. But such a proud loftiness as this was possible only for the few, and if we trust their confessions even they did not find it an easy or wholly victorious resolution of the whole issue.

For Christianity generally the sense life, particularly in its more elemental and urgent forms, was a foe not to be compromised with. The early Christians made of life therefore an endless struggle in which victory was to be achieved only by the mortification of the senses and the grace of God. Christianity, however, passed through its earlier periods of asceticism to a more general accommodation of the life of the soul with the needs of the house of clay in which it was for a season tabernacled; and our whole present order is the outcome of that adjustment as it has worked itself out in Christian civilization.

IV

But the adjustments have never taken the edge off the reality of the conflict, and the poets have always found here an inspiration for their song. According to an acute critic all poetry grows out of

the strain between the actual and the ideal. Intellectually, poetry is the only region in which the actual and the ideal find their reconciliation, just as esthetically art is the only region in which the actual and the ideal find their reconciliation. All poetry is born of our citizenship in two worlds. We are compelled to a residence in one of these, but our true citizenship is in the other. And though I do not think we shall find our escape merely in singing, there is in all noble song a testimony to the nostalgias of the soul, some intimation of the way of escape and, indeed, in the beauty and perfection of the song itself a transitory release, even though when the song is ended we are once again in our familiar and embattled world.

Sometimes the poet sings the longing, sometimes the struggle, sometimes the escape, but in the noblest range of poetry all these phases are made one in the completeness of the poet's art. Sir Henry Newbolt, to whom I am greatly in debt for this immediate approach to poetry, puts it all so nobly as to make quotation a virtue. He begins with some haunting verses from Yeats—

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes
dropping slow,
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the
cricket sings;
There midnight's all a glimmer, and moon a purple
glow,
And evening full of the linnet's wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements gray,
I hear it in the deep heart's core—

and goes on: "And it is to be noted that this longing, which in one way or another is the inspiration of all the 'passionate moments' of great poetry, is not merely a desire to create 'a shadowy isle of bliss, Midmost the beating of that steely sea, Where tossed about all hearts of men must be'—it is not merely an escape, a refuge and oblivion. It is a longing for a real transformation of life, a transmutation of a world of good and evil into a world of unalloyed beauty. Even the poet whose lines I have just quoted, even William Morris, though he called himself the idle singer of an empty day, was never satisfied to escape from life and forget it. In his *Earthly Paradise* we are never for long untouched by the homesickness of the spirit; in his Epics, *Sigurd the Volsung* and *The Lovers of Gudrun,* as in all true Epics, we are carried into a world transfigured by heroic ardor and heroic endurance. This is still more characteristic of great tragedy. Life is never so free nor so triumphant in this world as in the moment when this world has been defied past reconciliation; the moment when the last ship has been burnt and the last fight lost; when the bright day is gone and we are for the dark; when Cleopatra calls to Iras:

Give me my robe, put on my crown: I have
Immortal longings in me . . . .
I am fire and air: My other elements
I give to baser life.[2]

In one fashion or another all poetry is woven of such strands as these—the homesickness of the soul for some land of pure delight, the compulsions for the quest of it, the sense of pilgrim fate and fortune in the conduct of the quest, and some anticipation of the outcome of it all caught in insight and made enduring in a song. Almost every lyric has this quality in some accent or another of it, for truly faith and longing are the wings by which a lyric takes its flight. Whatever else it may have, whether it be some pathos of unshed tears, some glint of laughing light, some echo of some "old, unhappy, far-off things," some memory of love, some shimmering enmeshing of earth or air or sky, it has always this quality of longing, some passion to escape the actual for the ideal.

The poet's sense of the central significance of the struggle, or else the region to which, to be more clear, he assigns it, depends both upon his time and his temper. Browning took human nature for his terrain. He loved certain human types—the Italian of the Renaissance, the Arab, the Greek, Paracelsus with his strange lore, or else this one or that whom he created to suit his purpose, but always with a

[2] Henry Newbolt, *A New Study of English Poetry*, pages 18-19.

marvelous and consistent veracity. With the inner life for a man for the field, with his passions and prides and unrepentant recollections and shadowy or shining qualities for soldiers or actors, he reveals with subtle, searching analysis all the aspects of the soul at war with itself.

V

The dramatist generally wants to put a single quality in a single character and let them fight it out between them, or laugh it out between them, in tragedy or comedy. The poet, if he is neither lyric nor didactic, makes an epic of some aspect or other of the endless strife in which our humanity is caught, using the plains of Troy, or the Garden of Eden, or Heaven, Purgatory and the Inferno for the field of it. Tennyson took some old legends for his material, incarnated this or that embattled quality in such of King Arthur's knights as seemed to serve his purpose, and carried the struggle through in a series of episodes, some of which seem to bear but remotely upon his central theme. His whole treatment reflects the romanticism of his time and is almost entirely wanting in the realistic analyses of which we are so fond. The most searching criticism of the *Idylls* from the point of view of these lectures is their one-track approach to the entangled soul.

The Victorians had a way of defining sin too largely in terms of sense surrender (which brings us back to the early Christian view), and I think

Tennyson shared that point of view excessively. He wants the gift to see evil in all its subtle shading. In following evil down or up, I do not know which, in its more dark and subtle forms to some perversion of the soul itself, Browning has an insight Tennyson never had. But for all that there is a murky splendor of strife through all the *Idylls*. If Tennyson had known it, he was speaking for his own time more truly than King Arthur's; the glowing idealisms which show through his century were also to find too soon a red eclipse. But if we stand far enough away from the *Idylls* they reveal in a nobly suggestive way, not only "sense at war with soul," but the difficult adventure of all high idealisms and high purposes at war with sense and folly and fate. There are passages in which he really ceases to be the poet laureate and becomes the mystic interpreter of life and the soul. There are symbolic passages, movements of great insight, and now and then a half-dozen lines which touch the timeless.

The *Idylls* are themselves but the retelling of Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*. They are creations made up of old memories and misty legends and what actual fact the historian may find, and all sublimated by romance. Whatever significance attaches to them for our purpose is largely in Tennyson's treatment of King Arthur. Arthur's coming and his passing are strange and mystic. There is no agreement as to his birth and the poet does not mean that there shall be. He was born before his mother's

time—his father being dead—and reared by Merlin. There was a legend that he was not born at all, but came in out of the great deep riding the ninth wave. Which if it means anything means, I suppose, that birth is always a mystery, as we ourselves are, living in the light a little on a narrow space of land between two seas, the "great deep" out of which we come, the "great deep" to which we return.

Tennyson never tells us what the "great deep" is. It is certainly a depth of mystery; it is likely the depth of eternity; it is perhaps the depth of God. He believed man to be a revelation, if not an emanation of the divine, and that man fulfills his doom, "Making Him broken gleams and a stifled splendor and gloom." Which means, it may be, that life is not only "a dome of many-colored glass" to stain "the white radiance of eternity," but also a way of existence both to reveal and obscure the Glory of God. He welcomed his own son as "out of the deep, my child, out of the deep."

> For in the world which is not ours They said
> "Let us make man," and that which should be man,
> From that one light no man can look upon,
> Drew to this shore lit by the suns and moons
> And all the shadows.

If Tennyson had been set to write an epitaph for our general humanity he would have offered this single line, "From the great deep to the great deep

he goes." Man is born naked and a mystery, but he is armed with the sword of wonder received from supernal hands, there to be returned when he has done fighting with it.

> the blade so bright
> That men are blinded by it—on one side,
> Graven in the oldest tongue of all this world,
> "Take me," but turn the blade and ye shall see,
> And written in the speech ye speak yourself,
> "Cast me away."

There is then a force which a man needs for the struggle here which he will sometime be able to lay down. You may call it what you will—courage, conscience, purpose, perhaps the entirety of that personality which is, in the world of sense and time, the instrument of God's vaster purpose for embattled life. The King has naturally a capitol city, Camelot, but the city itself is not what it seems and there is no agreement as to who first built it. It was reputed to have been built to the music of fairy harps, and nothing is real therein save the King himself,

> . . . tho' some there be that hold
> The King a shadow, and the city real.

The King is the lord of the impossible idealisms of life, and his causes, being the causes of the soul, are such as no man can escape vowing himself to, and such as no man can serve without many failures. The King's hall is rich in symbolism, for four great zones of sculpture gird it:

And in the lowest beasts are slaying men,
And in the second men are slaying beasts,
And on the third are warriors, perfect men,
And on the fourth are men with growing wings.

In such ways as these the poet invests old tales with meanings which need no elaboration. It is the business of the King, of course, to order his realm and hunt out beasts and robbers, redress wrong, build roads and let the light in upon shadowed places; which is, perhaps, Tennyson's way of resinging Browning's single line, "Why stay we on earth except to grow?" Growth is never a thing done in a vacuum. It is the way of body, mind or soul with concrete things upon which these exercise themselves and from which they draw their strength. Growth is measured finally by our power to overcome, and life is kind in providing us with an abundance of obstacles—else how should we grow?

VI

In choosing King Arthur for the symbolic hero of the adventures of the embattled soul Tennyson has limited himself, for defeat is foredoomed. I do not think this has anything to do with Tennyson's philosophy of life, but if it has the differences between Tennyson and Browning are profound. Browning is confident of the outcome and accepts no defeat anywhere, though he too, as Tennyson, falls back, when he is hard pressed, upon the issue of the conflict in the eternal order.

The only hint of victory in the *Idylls* is the echo which one hears in their noblest passage in the passing of Arthur; otherwise, to quote Arthur Benson, "the dominant note of the *Idylls* is a failure to realize great aims." In some of them pure love is wasted, in others passion debases love or else wisdom is the victim of wantonness, and generally toward the end the shadows gather deeply.

If one wants to make a theological use of it all, Dr. A. H. Strong sums it all up in a paragraph: "King Arthur has set out to win and continue the kingdom of righteousness, noble devotion and love, and he fails. What are the hindrances? First, man's sensual appetites. The story of Lancelot and Guinevere is the story of passion dethroning faith. . . . One evil example corrupts the court until only three or four of Arthur's helpers are left untainted." The second hindrance is an impossible idealism, the quest of the Holy Grail. Here Tennyson sounds a deep, true note. The saving force of life, the achieved glory of it, is not to follow any quest, however high, which takes us away from the homely duties of life. If the blood of Christ made the Grail holy, the spirit of Christ makes holy every task in which His will is done. To leave His homely human service and follow the symbols of His sacrifice is to make His sacrifice of no avail.

The entangled soul will never find deliverance either in surrender to low solicitation or in any quest for a fugitive perfection, however sacramental,

which calls it away from the ordering of the realm it was sent to govern. A state thus deserted is twice weakened, once by its sins and once by its dreams. It is open then to all its foes and nothing is left, either to the King or to the soul, save the last great battle in the west, the issue of which is already determined. There is little wonder that a man so hard beset should sometimes doubt God Himself, and wonder why he was ever committed to the strife at all, or where God is while the fight goes on.

> I found Him in the shining of the stars
> I marked Him in the flowering of His fields,
> But in His ways with men I find Him not.
> I waged his wars, and now I pass and die.

VII

It would seem then the fortune of our humanity to live beleaguered by foes and die besieged by doubts. Here immediately Browning would take issue with Tennyson, for in this region there is a deep disparity of temper between the two men. And yet, I must qualify this "immediately," for Tennyson knew also the glory of the struggle. He also knew that it was "the glory of virtue to fight, to struggle, to right the wrong." But Browning saw deeper. He saw that the struggle itself was the glory, and that, though a man pass and die, if he be able to say, "I waged his wars," he has not lived in vain.

For my part I would put my back against this as

the ultimate defense of the beleaguered soul or the entangled soul either. There are not many things which a man may say with sure confidence in a life of shadow, but this one thing he may know—he may know whether he has sought to wage God's wars or not; he may even be wrong and mistake some lesser war for God's. But, if he think himself to be fighting God's wars, and fight them through with that conscience, vision and courage he possesses, then I declare to you that, though he is born of the great deep of mystery and lost in the great deep of oblivion, to have fought God's wars is glory enough and wage enough to be born for and die for. And if the travail of the universe has been only for this, that man shall stand for a span erect under the stars and draw the sword of his purpose and his soul for God, that travail has not been in vain.

The passing of Arthur is invested with the same mystery as his coming. He and his broken army are pushed back to the shore of the ultimate sea. He has no longer strength to hold his sword, and now that the time has come to cast it away Tennyson weaves a moving suggestion of the reluctance with which the militant strength and splendor of life are surrendered into the story of its return to the deeps—but no man can die till Excalibur is given back. The King himself is welcomed by the mystic three, Faith and Hope and Love. The tallest of them all and fairest takes him to her bosom and washes away his blood with her tears.

I wish Tennyson, in the splendor of all this, had not made Arthur preach a little sermon on prayer. There didactic Victorianism speaks, but I suppose even a poet has to do something to get sufficient amount of matter in his poems. But Tennyson is a poet again as Arthur passes out of human sight, for then in five great lines, than which Tennyson never wrote anything nobler, the final deliverance of the entangled soul is witnessed. The struggle itself is invested with immortal meanings and some light and music of victory comes back to the field where all seems to have been lost:

> Then from the dawn it seem'd there came, but faint
> As from beyond the limit of the world,
> Like the last echo born of a great cry,
> Sounds, as if some fair city were one voice
> Around a king returning from his wars.

Here Tennyson and Browning are one again, and one with the profoundest insights of life, and one with the Christian faith. Earth and time are only a battlefield; the struggle itself is the victory, and if it be nobly waged the warrior's spirit shall make the last great adventure, "a king returning from his wars."

Chapter Three

FAITH AND DOUBT—*IN MEMORIAM*

The setting and occasion of *In Memoriam* are familiar enough. Arthur Hallam, the son of Henry Hallam, who wrote a learned and depressing history of the Middle Ages, was in the very early thirties, before the youthful Victoria had put up her back hair, an undergraduate at Cambridge. He was marked as a young man of unusual promise, in a group where promise had to be very unusual to be noticed at all; the men with whom Tennyson and Hallam were associated at Christ's Church made great names for themselves. There was some sort of fructifying force at work a little over a century ago to make the dates 1809 to 1812 or 1815 natal years to be recorded in the Hall of Fame of letters, science and statesmanship.

Hallam was engaged to Emily Tennyson, and Alfred loved him as a brother; in fact he says more than his brothers—which probably cast no reflection on the Tennyson family ties. A good deal must be allowed in any study of *In Memoriam* for the excessive sentimentality of the time. Arthur Hallam died in Vienna, in 1833, and Tennyson was deeply

shaken by his death. His (Tennyson's) genius was touched a little by some tendency to melancholia, which at one time took a threatening form. The poet made some unfortunate investments of his patrimony during the general period covered by *In Memoriam* and not only suffered from a lack of money, but was compelled by these losses to postpone his marriage, experiences trying to even a poet's soul. Hallam's death, then, the romanticism of the time, Tennyson's peculiar temperament and his depressing personal experiences for almost ten years all find a voice in *In Memoriam*. It is a lyric weaving of personal and universal sorrow into a web of song.

I

I am not inclined to quarrel with a poet's way of telling the world his grief. We should otherwise have lost a very noble element in English verse. Sorrow and its attendant train of doubts and fears are very real elements in life; they are actually understood only from the inside, and they are terribly lonely. There is no road, to change the figure and borrow a phrase from Carlyle, into the "sanctuary of sorrow," save sympathetic understanding or else your own experience.

If, therefore, a poet fitted through rare sensitiveness to understand sorrow in all its subtle shadowed ways, and to find words which are themselves vibrant instruments to tell his understanding, pub-

lishes his grief to the world and shows us how he met and mastered it, he makes a very real contribution to the cure of souls. If Arthur Hallam had lived out his life he might have contributed nothing to literature so significant as the sequence of poems in which Tennyson both enshrined his memory and recorded with a particular exactness the movements of his own mind, and his spirit too, as he sought to resolve sorrow and doubt into triumphant faith.

In Memoriam belongs as much to confessional literature as to poetry, and if we should approach it as we approach St. Augustine's *Confessions* or Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations* we should find a key which the purely literary critic often misses. The poem was about ten years being written and was finished in 1842; the prologue was added in 1849. There is no order to it, save the meditative movement of Tennyson's mind touching now this and now that aspect of the loss which changed his world. "The general way of its being written," Tennyson said, "was so queer that if there were a blank space I would put in a poem."

I suppose the poem as a whole is woven very much as a rug which has taken a long time to weave and has grown through the years with really no pattern at all to begin with, save what the creative genius of the artist and the circumstance of time and life would supply. It reflects therefore both outer and inner happenings. You may trace the fortunes of the Tennyson family through its cantos

and the changing pageants of the changing years as well. You may follow the poet himself in little journeys or some wistful returning to places of dear associations. You may follow also the healing way of time with him, his sorrows sublimated till they become only a pathos in solution in the general atmosphere of life, which is thereafter both more tender and more clear, as a September day whose hard brilliancy is softened by some impalpable fabric of mist in the air.

If *In Memoriam* were nothing more than this, it would still have a value all its own. It is never for nothing that a poet lets us look into ten years of the life of his soul. Besides, it is in many ways one of the two great poetic creations of the nineteenth century, it and Browning's *Ring and the Book*. *The Ring and the Book* is the vaster creation. It has the rich variety of an old cathedral through whose multi-colored windows the light falls in a broken splendor of color upon aisle or high altar, and the sculptured recitative of whose front is sometimes rich in nobly carved figures, and sometimes in a kind of caprice, as if the sculptor would show the abundance of his resource not in the grave beauty of his kings and prophets, but in the grotesque unreality of his gargoyles. Compared with *The Ring and The Book, In Memoriam* is a Greek temple, perfect in the proportion of its parts and the delicacy of its lines. You grow tired of its restraint sometimes, wondering how such a passion

as the poet professes could have always been held in bonds by so disciplined an art.

But for all that, a Greek temple has something to match a Gothic cathedral. That power of Tennyson to which we have already referred, his way of long brooding till his work is as finished as his art can make it, with a fineness to conceal its structural strength and depth of meaning, is manifested in *In Memoriam* from first to last. I do not know in all literature any such sustained association of perfect craftsmanship in words with philosophies in solution and the travail of the soul as one finds in these one hundred and thirty-one cantos. There is a quotable quality about much of it, of which the essayists and preachers of the last sixty years have availed themselves to give some glint of restrained splendor to many an otherwise gray passage.

Our figure of the rug is no bad figure here, for Tennyson has used a thousand lovely little things to adorn his pattern: "The little speed-well's darling blue," "The herald melodies of Spring," the somber shadow of the yew trees in the churchyard, the futile drift of wind-borne seed, a wet, dark dawn, the sound of wind in the trees, the play of shadows across the grass, the happy light of a golden afternoon, the return of spring-migrant birds, the ebb and flow of little tide-washed rivers; in a word, the whole of Tennyson's intimate and loving knowledge of English seasons and the English countryside give texture, color, beauty to his song.

II

But the framework of the poem is woven of sterner stuff. The warp of it is faith, and the woof of it is doubt, and the dominant dye of it is grief, and through all the color with which he adorns it you may see and feel these darker yarns. Tennyson is working in a far more intimate and vital region in *In Memoriam* than in the *Idylls of the King*. The *Idylls* retell an old tale, subduing it to a half-romantic and half-symbolic meaning. But *In Memoriam* is a record of his ten-years' grappling with something far older than King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, just the shadowed side of life, with all its meanings both for faith and the disciplines of the soul itself. It might almost be called the Autobiography of a Grief, but it goes deeper than that and searches the hidden bases of confidence in God and life and love.

We began with Browning's passionate certainty of the necessity for growth which attaches to all the prophetic incompleteness of life, conditioned by the fact that, directly we begin to grow, personality finds itself entangled in an apparently alien order. Browning believed this order on the whole to be not only friendly to growth but expressly contrived to further it. The growth he conceived was by no means a painless unfolding. It was rather a wearing struggle in which a man is pulled in two ways between God and the devil, constantly faced by foes who might be semblance or shadow but

whose spiritual service it was to make him draw his sword and have at them with hearty good will.

A vast deal of Browning's more characteristic good work reflects the more subtle aspects of this struggle, though he has a disconcerting fashion of going out of his way to create situations which, one is inclined to believe, are rooted in no necessary travail of the soul, but rather in the poet's love of crabbed argument. But in the main he manages to set before us entangled souls fighting their way out from manifold subtle situations, and, for him, always the fight's the thing. Again and again his individual characters seem to lose the fight, but the entire movement of his mind is toward a triumphant assertion of the power of God's love and man's love to redeem every situation and vindicate the human enterprise. Faith is somewhere in all this, an indispensable element, and there is a solution of faith through the entire range of Browning's writings.

I say a solution of faith because he does not often show an embattled soul at grips with doubt in any concrete situation. I would not say that such poems as *Bishop Bloughram's Apology* bear strongly and strategically upon embattled faith. Browning's real faith is a matter of gleams and flashes. It breaks through in assurance rather than arguments. I doubt whether Browning himself ever had a set-to with doubt which involved the ultimate realities of God and love. Tennyson, I think, did, and he is therefore a more understanding guide in some

regions through which the nineteenth century darkly adventured than any poet of them all.

III

If the entangled soul is to gain any kind of deliverance it must at least have faith for a guide. It must believe the struggle worth while, to begin with, for if there is no issue to justify the cost, why fight? Our own more subtle and paralyzing doubts are just in this region. The pessimist does not deny the reality of the struggle. He has a somber sense of man's embattled will at odds with an impassive order, but he sees no outcome of the strife in which a man can believe himself to have won anything really worth winning, or long to be possessed. Henry Adams felt this way about history. It is the sobering record of the failing power of humanity. We are all parts of an order which is running down, with nothing to wind it up again when once its initial force is spent. The Stoic had something of this philosophy, but he had, besides, an audacious hope that spent cycles would renew themselves and the age of gold come back again. The outstanding pessimists of the nineteenth century, or the twentieth either, have no use for an age of gold.

Browning never had any doubt about the issue of the struggle. In this region, at least, his faith was unclouded. But, if the issue be nothing more than the bloody but unbowed head of Henley, the struggle is still unjustified. It is something to be

captain of one's soul, but unless one bring his craft into some desired haven or other the voyage is hardly worth undertaking. There must be, besides, a faith in the harbor itself, and in dominant tides and winds to which if a man commit himself he shall finish his voyage worthily, which is only another way of saying that we need faith in some coöperative force to which we may trust the issue of our lives, provided we bear a wise, brave part ourselves.

F. W. H. Myers was asked not long before his death what he wanted most to know. "I want most to know," he said, "if the universe is kind." Most of us want a more personal and intimate assurance than that. The universe is too vast and too vague for its abstract friendliness to be of any great comfort in the struggle of the entangled soul, but even so Myers was reaching toward something we cannot live without. If the universe is actually hostile to the spiritual order, then the spiritual order is alien under the stars. Only the very strongest can put any heart into the struggle at all, and even then they have nothing to look forward to save a struggle without comradeship or reënforcement.

Religious faith has gone much farther than this. It has not asked the universe to be kind. It has asked God to be near and considerate. Without God the fate of the entangled soul is beyond all calculation, and the prophecy of the unfulfilled a futile prophecy. Now, generally speaking, the nineteenth century took over the closely articulate faith

of the Christian tradition. There were exceptions, of course, but nothing to greatly count. God is. He has His way with men. The Christian revelation is the assurance of that way, and a man, to be sure of the outcome, had only to accept it by assenting to its creeds and living thereafter a godly, righteous and sober life.

IV

Shelley was in a way the first of the nineteenth century's protesting voices, but Shelley's rebellion did not go to the root of the matter, any more than Byron's profitable advertisement of his own sentimental sorrows. Wordsworth's serene pantheism sublimated faith in a luminous communion with Nature, but there is no element of struggle in it. The elements of struggle which emerge in *In Memoriam* are twofold; one of them is as old as sorrow and tears, but the other is new, the struggle of faith with the vast impersonal drive of the cosmic order.

Faith is always being undone through some trying personal experience. We believe naturally in God because we think Him kind to us, and His kindness is manifest in health, prosperity and love untroubled through the kindly years. We have a way of driving a bargain with God, long ago naïvely expressed in Jacob's vow, "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and raiment to put on, so that I come again

to my father's house in peace, then Jehovah will be my God." We do not always stop to consider that these terms have never been expressly ratified by the Divine but, if they are broken by unhappy circumstance, we either accuse God of not keeping faith or wonder if there be any God at all. These are deep entanglements, and it needs a strong faith and a way to find love beyond the shadow and

> reach a hand through time to catch
> the far-off interest of tears.

But, if the soul, so entangled in pain and loss, finds in its quest for comfort no trace of God at all either within or without, the stars blindly running in their courses and nature a phantom, a "hollow form with empty hands," then the struggle becomes tragically significant. This brings us very near the heart of the struggle of faith in the nineteenth century. Science has slowly discovered, or believes itself to have discovered, a vast impersonal order, supremely careless of the individual. Certainly the only answer which could ever come back to man from any appeal to an order like this would be the haunting echo of his own cry. This is an undoing of faith which goes to the roots of things and *In Memoriam* is the record of Tennyson's own experience with that deep undoing as he set out from sorrow to find God.

The most arresting thing about the poem is its prophetic character. It was finished ten years before

Darwin published the *Origin of Species,* and yet you would declare the whole of the controversy which evolution has released to be written between its lines. This is one of the reasons why it was for long so much quoted. It has a music by which they could march who found in evolution only an impassive order for which the individual has no value, and it has also a music by which they could march who saw in the outcome of the struggle.

> One God, one law, one element
> And one far-off divine event,
> Toward which the whole creation moves.

I do not pretend that it is easy to find a thesis in *In Memoriam,* or use it safely to demonstrate a point. It would lose its finer value if that were possible, and be theology instead of poetry. The true service of the poet to his own or any other time is not in his power of ordered reasoning, however acute that may be, but in the range of his winged passion and the light-shot certainty of his intuitions. Browning knew this and failed to be always guided by his knowledge. He has little enough confidence in a man's power to know. He has every confidence in a man's power to feel, and, directly he begins to argue he ceases, as if to illustrate his own contention, to be a poet and becomes merely an acute and provocative mind with a rare genius for putting cases and leaving out his "i's" and "f's."

And if it should prove in the end that the final

demonstrations of spiritual reality are not in reasoned proof at all, but in some deep, pure sense of inner peace, in assurances

> That never can be proved
> Until we close with all we love
> And all we flow from, Soul in Soul,

then the poet's way may prove the true and luminous way and we shall reach in a song or a psalm what argument can never attain but which is none the less true for all that.

V

Moreover, and this is to anticipate our conclusion, the great certainties are never reached save through the entire ripening of life toward the unseen and eternal. I do not know any way to say how this is done or what combines to do it. I do know we set out on our spiritual pilgrimage from some inherited faith as a point of departure, a faith which is itself the achievement of our common humanity. Though such a faith validate itself now by creeds and books and authorities, it was, to begin with, only the working adjustment of the human soul to realities which the soul demanded for its own integrity, and the proof of which it found in the power thus acquired to live nobly and bravely.

Then, each one of us, after his own fashion, repeats in the mystic process of the race. Some of us are fortunate enough, or unfortunate—I do not

know which—to live and die beneath the undisturbed shelter of an immemorial faith, never having been "stung by the sudden splendor of a thought" or compelled to high adventure on those trackless seas which lead to God. Others, like Newman, putting out to sea, find it too rough beyond the breakwater and turn back again, excusing themselves for their caution by making a divine institution of the harbor. Others still take to the high seas but, through some tragic mischance, never find their desired haven, so affording proper illustration of the foolishness of spiritual adventure to those who keep quite safe at home. Others win through, and the most precious cargo they bring in is their testimony that the passage can be safely made with high profit to the brave adventurer. Now Tennyson did just this.

He begins with Browning's note of the possibility of growth, even though we climb with our dead selves for stairs; but he puts it in the past tense:

> I held it truth with him who sings
> To one clear harp in divers tones,
> That men may rise on stepping stones
> Of their dead selves to higher things.

Longfellow says that this is as old as St. Augustine, though St. Paul had his own way of saying it, and his deeper way of knowing it, but the "I *held*" is Tennyson's distinctive note. That confidence was gone; Arthur Hallam's death had made a gray mist

of it. Belief is always in the present tense or it is nothing at all, and of all life's losses a lost faith is the most costly. We may take the "fell clutch of circumstance" if we have faith enough to subdue it all to high those far-off ends. A man may go through any valley of the shadow, if only God is with him and there is light beyond; but if not,——?

Moreover, a lost faith has to be found again where it is lost. There are some battles which must be fought through to a finish on the same terrain, and the battle for faith is one of them. If one has lost his faith through man, he must rediscover it in humanity. If he has lost it through the impact of the natural order, he must regain it by making science tributary to a richer faith. If he has lost it through pain and sorrow, it must be regained in some wealth of experience which pain and sorrow release. It was to this that Alfred Tennyson addressed himself. He had believed in the far-off interest of tears, but when the tears were his own—and he belonged to an age in which a poet, at least, might confess to tears—it was an entirely different matter.

He cannot immediately assert any prevailing force. We rarely can, in the first shock of any loss. The main thing is that we should not be entirely defeated, which is maybe what St. Paul meant when he exhorted the hard-beset, having done all else, to stand. And yet standing does not mean keeping a fixed spot, but rather an unresting movement of

the mind about some central position we cannot yield without irreparable loss. Half the trouble with *In Memoriam* for our present purpose is that the poet is never at rest at all. He calls his cantos "short swallow-flights of song," and how can you weave an argument out of a swallow's flight? Only as you remember that beneath the lyric and various movement of the verse there is somehow hid and somehow shown a far more massive movement; the poem does get on because the poet himself is getting on, and he carries his song with him as the tide carried its chop against the wind.

He takes his actual point of departure in the second canto. He cannot believe that despair has the final word to say about anything. Sorrow's lips are lying lips if they so much as whisper that even "nature stands, a hollow form with empty hands," and there is nothing anywhere to give back, either to the questioning or protesting, more than the echo of their own cry. Now all this goes deeper than it seems. Life cannot be dealt with in terms of negation. If there is nothing else, there is at least our own positive force; the commanding approach to any contested position is in terms of affirmation. Carlyle's "everlasting yea" is the key to every position we are ever called upon to carry. The dominion over which we are set has a horizon range of which the old tellers of the story of our genesis never dreamed. Truth is our dominion, and duty too, and love and facts and dreams, and they have no mean-

ing for us unless we impose upon them the force and the confidence of our highest and our best. The whole of experience is plastic stuff to be subdued to the final integrities of the soul.

Philosophy has, of late, lost itself in the fog through profitless inquiries about our power to know, but we do know, we know that we know, and the cleverest philosopher of them all would never dare to bring his metaphysic to his breakfast table, or he would sit there and starve. It is a clever game with words to say that an entirely consistent skepticism is impossible because, if you doubt everything, you must doubt doubt; but it is a law of our own inner selves, to which in some true deep way our outer world seems to answer, that life is never justly seen through the shadow. The shadowed side of life, by which I mean sorrow, pain, moral fault and the various wastes of failure, refracts the truth, because, it may be, all this is no part of the right and enduring order.

Life is meant to be seen through goodness and love and normal health and normal circumstance, and though we may not always be able to see things steadily and see them whole, save through the mists of things—and sometimes the tears of things—as we see the stars through our terrestrial atmosphere, we must allow for moral and emotional refraction as we allow for atmospheric refraction. In any quest for faith, allow for the distortion of realities seen through doubt. In any search for God through your

tears, allow for tears. But it is one thing to distrust the lying lips of sorrow, and another to find the juster understanding and the poet's task is only begun—not finished.

VI

His song now plays about his loss in ways too delicate to put into prose, too swift in variant movement easily to follow. His verses put out to sea to meet the ship which brings home the clay of his friend, or feels, as sorrow always feels, the aching contrast between the peace of dew-drenched fields and a broken heart. But somewhere, woven through this texture, is the force of an awakening will which says "Thou shall not be the fool of loss."

The shadows fool us as they blind us. They put on strange shapes and besiege us with fears as shadowy as themselves and hide our true defenses from us. There is no way through them save the way of courage and awakened purpose. There is always then a dawn in which, light smitten,

> The spectral camp is fled,
> Faith shineth as a morning star,
> Our ghostly fears are dead.

But they do not die in one dawn.

If there were a purely literary study of *In Memoriam,* instead of a way of making something very much like a sermon out of it, we should note the exquisite beauty of the lyrics in which Tennyson

sings all those sad services which attend the burial of his friends till

> He in English earth is laid,
> And from his ashes may be made
> The violet of his native land,

and the devastation which follows, beneath whose tidal flood the very springs of song are stilled. There is in any deep disturbance of life, whether it be a merchant's bankruptcy or the death of someone for whom we greatly care, or some dissolving shock to faith itself, a time of pressing duties which both distracts and sustains us. But when we are left alone amongst ruins a little cleared away, the real struggle begins. It is a beginning to know that sorrow's lips are lying lips. It is more to resolve not to be the fool of loss, but when we are left alone with

> The shadow cloak'd from head to foot,
> Who keeps the keys of all our creeds,

we are come at last to grips with reality. In the poet's personal situation he lays hold first of the steadfastness of love, and through a long movement of *In Memoriam,* love is the motive of his song. The love of which he sings is very simple. It is love for Arthur Hallam. Love is a vast, related order, as many-gated as the celestial city, and any lovelit road leads at last to the throne room. Its beginnings are deep in the ancient protective order of life, the brooding of a bird over her nestlings, the piteous

courage of shy things for their young, the fierce courage of tooth and claw in the same defense; it is always, if it be only the fragrance of a blossom, the color of a falling petal, some dedication of the individual, no matter how fugitive, to something vaster than itself.

There was a time, now lost in time, when love became a conscious thing in human life and found a name for itself. It was not alien to old instincts, but it was also akin to the new dreams. It was a way of loss or happy gain, a recentering of life in those outside oneself, a passion, a peace, and always the unfulfilled prophecy of some more ample expression. The true measure of love is not its source but its destination. If it be rooted in old urgencies of the flesh it has still a power to transform them. If it sits first by the hearthstone, it may go out to make the world its hearthstone, and the truly understanding have found it the one road from self to God safe to follow through any shadow.

Now Tennyson sets out on that road, for he finds his love for his friend the one enduring thing of which he may be sure:

> No lapse of moons can canker Love,
> Whatever fickle tongues may say.

We might wish a poet did not always have to say a simple thing in a twisted way to get a rhyme, but no matter, if love endures, it keeps its own enduring values.

'Tis better to have loved and lost
Than never to have loved at all.

There are gains in life which do persist after the occasion of them is past—or lost—and a wise recognition of this, and a brave use of our knowledge, are the key to a vast reach of victorious living. You may be done with a book when you have made the message of it part of your own mind, or forget a song if only you are thereby a little attuned to all music. The ministry of a sunset does not end with twilight. Love outlasts death, and though the edge of loss is cutting keen, love is worth the cost.

VII

Yet must love lose forever? I wonder if it was not first of all a poet who made men free of their audacious faith in immortality. Immortality was an intuition at first, a dream, a flash. The certainty of it has always outflown the reasoned support of it, since all great confidences have their hidden bases in something older and deeper than reason. Poetry, as we saw to begin with, is the supreme reconciliation of the ideal and the real, the more sure because it approached the real from the side of the ideal. "Feeling," says Dr. George A. Gordon, "is the great and legitimate storehouse of the poet, and out of that, he draws not only visions, splendid as the outgoing of the morning and the evening, but also the character of the invisible world. From the impress

upon feeling, from the clear image in the depths of emotion, he seeks the moral order of life, the purpose of God, the law of destiny."

Now just because the great poets possess the supremest range of creative imagination given to our humanity, and hold it subject to the highest we can dream or demand, they are the great witnesses to the reality of the ideal. The argument that unless the ideal were real it is not the perfect ideal is a game with words, but I do maintain that, throughout human experience, the open road has always been in the direction of the ideal. The great dreams do not fail us if only we hold them bravely enough and seek to realize them persistently enough. As far as registered experience goes, there has been a strange readiness of the natural order and the general force of personality to take the impress of our dreams and give them ever afterwards a permanency compared with which the hills melt and flow down.

Faith extends this sovereignty of the ideal into the unknown and unsensed; it assumes the moral integrity of existence and experience. The ultimate ideals of truth, love, justice, eternal life and God are not delusions given to mock us and make our estate the more bitter, but aspects of eternal reality rising through those depths whence man derives from God, to reach and rest in God again, and so complete their circle. Once and for all, Tennyson ties up the integrity of all the order of which we are a part with immortality!

My own dim life should teach me this,
That life shall live for evermore,
Else earth is darkness at the core,
And dust and ashes all there is.

But a man does not hold a faith like this unchallenged. The most numbing thing to touch and chill our faith is silence. We call and no answer comes back. I do not wonder at the hold spiritualism has had upon the questing. Any answer, if it be but a tipping table, any show of another force no matter how capricious, any accent of a voice that is still—and we should know. But we have not even the echo of our own cry, only silence. Through the door of silence the poet's doubt comes in:

A spectral doubt which makes me cold,
That I should be thy mate no more.

Even a spectral doubt has its uses. Tennyson's note has so far been purely personal. He has been engagingly frank, which is always a poet's privilege, and shared his sorrows with the world at large, quite as Lord Byron, Rousseau and the Romanticists. If he and Carlyle had held one of their famous smoke-befogged sittings during this period, the sage might have broken a nicotined silence to remind the poet that there was no act of legislature that he should be happy, that he might do without happiness and, instead thereof, find blessedness. And if the poet had answered, after a murky interval, that he was trying to do just that and finding it hard going,

Carlyle would have had little to tell him, though the Beatitudes might have come to his aid.

Tennyson found the road himself. Toward the middle of *In Memoriam* the poet takes a vaster and more inclusive line. You cannot indict the moral order from the shadowed shelter of your own individual experience, or justify it either from your own sunlit vantage point. It stands or falls by its massive outcome. "I have no right," a very wise man said to me once, "to demand that God's business be conducted for my personal benefit," which is very much what Carlyle believed in the abstract, though being, as most of us are, inclined to make himself the exception in his more dyspeptic moments.

The integrity of the individual is guaranteed by the integrity of God's entire order. Wordsworth's duty is no mere bond between man and man; it holds the stars in viewless bands. We are carried to our destiny on tides ample enough to sustain the whole of God's creation, and unless there be a power to save the entirety a single life is only a drop flung up to catch a moment's light, then to fall back into those somber and unresting currents which, in Bossuet's majestic phrase, "empty into the abyss of nothingness."

> The wish, that of the living whole
> No life may fail beyond the grave,
> Derives it not from what we have,
> The likest God within our soul?

But Nature seems to have another mind. It is still, remember, before Darwin shall make a science of the long travail of creative evolution, and establish struggle with all its tragic implications as a cosmic process. The poet saw it first:

> Are God and Nature then at strife,
> That Nature lends such evil dreams?
> So careful of the type she seems,
> So careless of the single life.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> So careful of the type? But no,
> From scarpèd cliff and quarried stone
> She cries, "A thousand types are gone;
> I care for none, they all shall go.
>
> I falter where I firmly trod,
> And falling, with my weight of cares
> Upon the great world's altar stairs
> That slope through darkness up to God,
>
> I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,
> And gather dust and chaff, and call
> To what I feel is Lord of all,
> And faintly trust the larger hope."

Alfred Tennyson carried the heart of the nineteenth century to the great world's altar stairs, and his seeking hands, uplifted, are the hands of three generations. For how could man hope to escape this universal destiny, and how can God be

> love indeed
> And love creation's final law

when Nature, not in red rapine—that is a poet's exaggeration, but in her impassive drive toward something beyond the horizons of time—seems to have as little concern for man as a wind-blown seed. Tennyson never answers this question in so many words, though I think there are two or three turning points in the next twenty cantos which reveal the resolution of his doubts. The first is his refusal to surrender entirely to doubt, upon which we have already dwelt; the second is his persuasion of the worth of love. He cannot think of any order, however impassive, taking no account of love:

> Love's too precious to be lost
> A little grain shall not be split.

He reaffirms the one persuasion that has so far sustained him:

> 'Tis better to have loved and lost,
> Than never to have loved at all.

He is beginning to know what Browning maintained with an ultimate audacity:

> A loving worm with its clod,
> Were diviner than a loveless God.

He trembles on the verge of the credo of the pope in *The Ring and the Book,* to which we shall come in the end, and he holds in solution the justification of all this "dread machinery of sin and sorrow." He finds next a new kindness and beauty in Nature.

It is not red in tooth and claw; it is rather a brooding nearness of beauty which begins to

> breathe
> Some gracious memory of my friend.
> . . . . . .
> Thy voice is on the rolling air;
> I hear thee where the waters run;
> Thou standest in the rising sun,
> And in the setting thou art fair.

Earl Grey, in a very noble passage in his address on Recreation, testifies to the comfort which the steadfastness of Nature and the unfailing sequence of the seasons, which no high explosive could shatter, afforded him during the war when all the human orders seemed in dissolution: "Every year, as spring came back unfailing and unfaltering, the leaves came out with the same tender green, the birds sang, the flowers came up and opened, and I felt that a great power of nature for beauty was not affected by the war. It was like a great sanctuary into which we could go and find refuge for a time from even the greatest trouble of the world, finding there not enervating ease, but something which gave optimism, confidence, and security. The progress of the seasons unchecked, the continuance of the beauty of nature, was a manifestation of something great and splendid which not all the crimes and follies and misfortunes of mankind can abolish or destroy." We do Nature an enormous wrong when we read

into her strong, deep, kind ways the angry tumult of our own souls. She has, rather, a power to comfort and sustain and the gift of tranquil restoration with a power to communicate

> Authentic tidings of invisible things,
> Of ebb and flow and ever during power,
> And central peace existing at the heart
> Of endless agitation.

In our seasons of sure insight, Nature is not a "hollow form with empty hands," but the felt presence of God. Tennyson finds this out and, most of all, he begins to hear the music of a vast, prevailing purpose behind all the change and seeming loss of Nature's ways.

> Aeonian music measuring out
> The steps of Time—the shocks of Chance—
> The blows of Death . . .

In the last thirty cantos of *In Memoriam* Tennyson surrenders himself fully to those sublime implications of evolution which captivated the dying nineteenth century. (John Fiske afterward put into very noble prose what the poet first sang.) Life is no slight stuff to be washed by the tides of time upon the shores to which the hills melt down,

> But iron dug from central gloom,
> And heated hot with burning fears,
> And dipped in baths of hissing tears,
> And battered with the shocks of doom
> To shape and use.

Eternal processes move on. The spirit walks from state to state, and though it "leaves its outworn form by life's unresting sea" its processional is not ended. A man may fight his doubts and gather strength "to find a stronger faith his own." The bells which measure the passing of the years ring no requiem. They only divide the false from the true. They ring in nobler modes of life, the love and truth and light, the larger heart, the kindlier hand, the years of peace, the Christ that is to be.

I suppose the deeper quarrel of the twentieth century with the nineteenth is that the echoes of the bells the poets then heard have been war and disillusionment. But for all that, how should we hear the bells with any heart at all if the poet's music were not the carillon of rocking ecstasy?

> Ring out wild bells to the wild sky,
> The flying clouds, the frosty light,
> The year is dying in the night,
> Ring out, wild bells, and let it die.

The hills are shadows and they flow from form to form, and nothing stands. But there is something above all change, and though a voice should cry

> Believe no more,
> . . . . . .
> A warmth within the breast would melt
> The freezing reason's colder part,
> And, like a man in wrath, the heart
> (Stand) up and answer, "I have felt."

Alfred Tennyson backed the intuitions of love against the challenge of death and the grave, and so could

> lift from out the dust
> A voice as unto him that hears
> A cry about the conquered years
> To one that with us works, and trust,
>
> With faith that comes of self-control,
> The truths that never can be proved
> Until we close with all we loved,
> And all we flow from, soul in soul.

Embattled faith can do no more.

Now how does all this bear upon life itself? I think in just this way—doubt is never resolved nor faith attained in any single demonstration. We grow into the ultimate realities and reach our strangely different fruitions because we have thrown the creative force (I am weighing every word carefully here) of our dreams, our needs, our idealisms toward dimly seen realities in which we believe we shall find our peace. We search a proper soil with all the questing roots of our being, or lift our higher growth toward a light and atmosphere proper to our needs.

It is very hard to say all this clearly enough, though I think, if I might change the figure, our ways of using a radio are helpfully suggestive. Some of us "tune in" with one broadcasting station, and some of us with another. We pass soliciting frag-

ments of broadcasting from a hundred stations to find the thing we seek, and what we seek is a revelation of ourselves and the realities in which we find our satisfactions. In a vaster and far more subtle way, life is a kind of quest for responses, and we find them after our seeking. For one man God is "nearer than breathing, closer than hands or feet." For another, He is unknown and unknowable. Love is one man's air and life, but an alien order for his neighbor. Why? Well, for many reasons, but, in the entirety of life, because some turn the whole seeking and receptive side of life toward God, and some turn away from Him. Such as these have slackened faith in the face of doubt, stopped short of love's radiant and final guidance, refused the high and austere roads of duty, or, in some lethargy of the soul, been disobedient to the Heavenly Vision.

There is, on the contrary, a way of taking the higher turn at every crossroad of doubt, of following duty through obedience to the realization of some supporting will, of following love into some always larger understanding and experience of love, of tuning in, so to speak, on every intimation of the presence of God, and seeking some sign of His presence even where He is hard to find. And the outcome of all this is presently so deep an establishment of life in a sense of God's love and presence and the supremacy of spiritual values as to make these more real than anything else in the world.

Such a resolution of life as this may come slowly

and not altogether easily. When it is attained, the certainty of its truth and righteousness is not so much in this or that demonstration of reason or logic as in some central peace of the soul itself, some consciousness of strong support from an unfailing strength, some entire and fruitful correspondence between what is best and most prophetic in ourselves and answering reality. This I take it to be the true witness of a poem like *In Memoriam.* Tennyson loved through and believed through, always facing Godward and loveward, and toward "the strong Son of God, immortal Love," till these became the native and timeless undergirding of his soul. In the kindling story of the ascent of Mount Everest, so nearly achieved, so narrowly missed, we are told how Mallory and Irvine set out to win the last storm-possessed crest, and passed from light in the clouds and winds which dispute the sovereignty of the top of the world. "But," says the narrator, "when last seen, they were going strong for the top."

Caponsacchi, in a passage I shall quote again, saw Count Guido

> Slowly and surely edged
> Off all the tableland whence life upsprings,
> Aspiring to be immortality.

The spiritual tragedy of life is to be edged off that upland. Like Mount Everest it is wind-swept and cloud-possessed, but the passion to attain it is the noblest of life's sustaining impulses, and if a man

is to disappear, as disappear he must, then let him be lost in a glorious adventure of love and faith, "when last seen, going strong for the top."

In Memoriam is a singing testimony that those who go strong for the top find the light and the peace of God beyond the wind and the cloud.

Chapter Four

FAITH AND LOVE TRIUMPHANT —*ABT VOGLER* AND *SAUL*

The road to any height of triumphant faith is long and hard to travel. The final expressions of it are brief, short to say and to read. Any historic creed has beneath and behind it literally centuries of struggle. There is no implication in the Nicean and Athanasian Creeds of the long travail in which they were born. But there they are, short enough, even if they are not too clear, the final phrasing of doubt and quest and faith drawn from a trampled wine-press and

> Secreted from man's life when hearts beat hard,
> And brains, high-blooded, ticked—

well, sixteen hundred years ago.

St. Augustine had his share in creating an austere, hard-edged theology, though he could, I think, have managed a brief statement of his own final faith. But it took all the *Confessions* reveal to make his theology possible. Tennyson has put the issue of all the mental and emotional processes which *In Memoriam* voices into the credo and prayer of the

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prologue. It is nothing against a confession of faith, then, that it is brief, and it is all in its favor if it be lyrical and glowing. If there be any singing thing in a man's soul at all, it should be his faith. Everything else is caught in some entanglement of sense and time, but faith should be winged and free. The old habit of singing the creed is not to be commended merely because what you sing is not to be taken seriously—what you sing is, maybe, your sincerest utterance, because it has freedoms and happinesses behind it, and you sing because you must. I should never distrust a creed a child could sing, or a man either. When they sang the rival faiths of Arius and Athanasius in the streets of Alexandria, faith was alive, even if somewhat confused. It's your creed needing careful saying, with a whip lash of anathema at the end of it, which would come under suspicion. A hard and joyless faith never justifies the ways of God to man, or else we shall have to find a God to suit the creed.

Now, first and last Browning worked hard in dusty and obscure regions to find a philosophy which could be made to scan and even rhyme, and justify the ways of God to man, at the same time. His mind, in an unusual way for any poet, worked about and through the problem of evil. He was resolved to find a victorious solution for it and to make the dark a vehicle of light, or at least to find a place for the light in the dark—and that is a considerable undertaking. If you are a dualist it is not so hard. Light

is light and has its sources and its own panoplied order. Dark is dark and has its own supporting force. Life and the world is divided between them and they fight it out. Neither side will ever be completely victorious, though humanity, which is, unfortunately for itself, the terrain of their hardest fighting, may be saved in part.

I

Dualistic speculation has rarely been frank enough to make God and the devil equally matched adversaries. God has rather somehow not had His perfect will with earth and man. Either He is too high up and too far away to reach us directly and so some lesser god has made the world "and has not power to shape it as he would," or the Creator God found the matter with which he was compelled to work an intractable material communicating its own taint to creation; or else the will of God was thwarted by man's disobedience and a trick of the adversary. Any such explanation as this accounts for evil—if it does account for it—but affords a ground for only a qualified optimism, depending almost entirely upon whether you are one of the saved or not.

But Browning was not a dualist. He was, I suppose, a monist—a 'oneist." His God had no alibi in the matter of pain and sin. These lay in the full current of the Divine Purpose. They are here certainly because he foresaw them, probably because he meant them to be; certainly, again because He could

not get what He wanted for man and from man without them, which I personally think is the only defensible position, though to answer why involves a vast reach of searching examination.

All defenders of philosophic idealism find hard going in this region. An idealist cannot be a dualist; a hopelessly divided order is not ideal. If he is a devout idealist, he must make God the undergirding reality. If he fears that name, his Absolute must serve much the same purpose. At any rate, what we call evil is somewhere in God's plan or in the content of the Absolute Ideal—a conclusion it takes a brave man to face. He may escape it by denying that evil is evil, or let evil in under another and less distressing name, but his main solution is in the contention that the moral order is a process which, like running water, purifies itself. The stream is deeply stained? Yes, but let it flow on, and it will come clean in the end. How could it flow on without the earthiness (but there dualism comes in) of its bed and of its banks? It will resolve it all in its flow and empty into the illimitable ocean of love at the last.

Sir Henry Jones in *A Faith that Enquires* takes this line. The perfect world, and the perfect moral order too, are not static or finished; "a perfect world is dynamic, the scene of the working of the good. . . . Moral good and moral evil are ways in which the will operates, true or false . . . they exist only when and as long as the process of willing goes on. The world . . . is the manifestation of a never resting process

which is spiritual. . . . That which is ultimate operates in it; but it operates in man in such a way as to permit the possibility of moral choice, and therefore of moral evil. A world that excluded this possibility would not be the best. Indeed, it would not be spiritual at all."

The possibility of evil thus released does issue an actual evil, there is no denying that. But evil "left to work itself out and ripen will prove to be self-contradictory and ultimately self-deleting. . . . Evil never tempted anyone unless it disguised itself. . . . The *nature* of evil is thus to make itself impossible. Not only is moral evil capable of being overcome and of being supplanted by the opposite good, but it is converted into it. The impulse toward what is wrong is turned into distrust and hatred of that wrong, and into a desire to serve the right more faithfully. . . . Moral evil or wrong-doing is the wrong use of gifts that are good. It is the turning them against themselves. . . . When, by its failure, it warns, when having learned its lesson, a nation or an individual devotes itself with new resolve to good ends, the evil . . . has already passed away." [1]

I have quoted Jones thus at length because his argument is representative. The perfect is the entire process. Evil is an inescapable aspect of it, but a passing aspect. The cost is great but the ultimate good justifies it and will be realized, if not in time,

[1] *A Faith That Enquires*, pages 193 et seq.

then in eternity. The stream does purify itself. Royce parallels Jones with enrichments of his own. He is, I think, more sensitive than Jones to our piteous and often tragic estate, and he involves God in it far more deeply than Jones, at least in the passages quoted. The travail of the process is saved by God's sharing. Salvation is in the "Infinite Self." "If we have the true insight of deeper idealism, we can turn from our chaos to Him, who is our one true and Divine Self, and can hear from Him with absolute assurance this one word, 'O ye who despair, I grieve with you. Yes, it is I Who grieve in you. Your sorrow is Mine. No pang of your finitude but is Mine too, I suffer it all, for all things are Mine. I bear it, and *yet* I "triumph." ' " [2] And Dante, too, has said all this in one single, timeless line: "In His will is our peace."

Hocking, and I shall soon be done with philosophers, wants us to face facts for what they are. "Willingness to confront every evil in ourselves and outside ourselves with the blunt factual conscience of science, willingness to pay the full causal price for the removal of the blemish; this kind of integrity can never be dispensed with in any optimistic program." But he maintains "that the real is the good and not the evil,—that evil is an essentially conquerable thing, not a reality coördinate with a purpose that is against it." [3] And it is only as we find

[2] *The Spirit of Modern Philosophy,* page 470.
[3] *The Meaning of God in Human Experience,* page 175 et seq.

ourselves anew in God, who is above all evil, that we shall escape it.

In one way and another, then, all these acute and sensitive thinkers accept the whole moral order and find it good, because the true power and purpose and passion of it are God's—and God is good.

II

Now, to come back to Browning again after this wearing excursion. He takes, in a strange and prescient way, all these philosophers have said and transfuses it with a splendor of song whose mounting and ecstatic power conceals the depths from which it upsprings. I think, to begin with, Browning's optimism upon which his time laid hold so strongly to be partly temperamental. He was fortunate in a sane and sunny balance of power. He had much to try him: a way of very true love which was not easy, a semi-invalid wife, a son who must have been a bit difficult, long-deferred public recognition, never too much money, and the early loss of his wife—and through it all he found life good. If he stooped, it was to find a flower; if he looked up, the sky was always blue. His wife's death was such a sorrow as Tennyson never knew in Hallam's death, and yet he never made a threnody of his tears but only sang the loveliest apostrophe a poet ever lifted to "Lyric Love, half angel and half bird." He was born an optimist, but he gave as much thought as

any poet ever gave to the philosophic implications of evil, and all his later poems suffered for it. He is not always consistent. Why should he have been? None of us ever are consistent, save in demanding consistency in other people. The free play of an alert and sensitive mind about a great theme is far more useful than fenced-in, straight-line approaches.

By far the best treatment of Browning's solution of evil is in Henry Jones' *Browning as a Philosophical and Religious Teacher,* a volume now unhappily out of print, and to which I acknowledge, generally, my indebtedness.

In the field of religion, the poet, the philosopher and the theologian all face the same challenge. How reconcile omnipotent love with hurt, or tears, or sin? Browning took his challenge face front and shaped his song to meet it. Life is for him the realization of a moral purpose, which is a loving purpose. The fight for character is the supreme good, and experience finds its meaning in its contribution to character. But character is always a conquest—"What each soul for itself conquered from out things there"—and we set out upon our conquering way from a pregnant finitude:

Man partly is and partly hopes to be.

. . . must pass from old to new
From vain to real, from mistake to fact,
From what once seemed good, to what now proves best,

being always "somewhat to cast off, somewhat to become." Whatever opposes us, then, is the ultimate servant of our souls and love's instrument, though shadowed. As we have seen already, he is never sure of the substance of the shadowed servants of the spirit. They may be real, they may themselves be shadows; no matter. If the fight's the thing shadows will serve as well to fight with as anything else, and the very doubt whether we are facing reality or illusion is one demand more upon our courage.

In fact, there is a strange fidelity to life in this capricious theory, for half the struggle of the soul is in exactly such a region as this. Who does not look back upon his own hard-won way to see, after some fight is done, that the illusory as well as the real engaged him and made it so much more the difficult? If I could know, in any single set-to, what is the real and what the phantom of my fears, my conflicts would be greatly simplified. Jones treats Browning just here as though he, Browning, were a fellow philosopher, and sets himself gravely to disprove the poet's theory of nescience. That, too, is a work of supererogation. I think Browning's position changed as his own experience changed. What was a phantom yesterday is real to-day, what was a hurt yesterday is to-day's healing. There is much the more need to be brave than even our ignorance is a grace.

Think

Could I see plain, be somehow certified
All was illusion,—evil far and wide
Was good disguised,—why, out with one huge wipe
Goes knowledge from me. Type needs antitype
As night needs day, as shine needs shade
So good needs evil.

You can make what you will out of this. I do not profess to understand it, save by feeling it the poet's persuasion that a world of absolute moral certainty would take all the element of adventure out of the moral enterprise. The chance of being wrong is the condition of the glorious chance of being right.

Browning, then, finds evil—and his evil is inclusive, for it is sometimes pain and sometimes sin—the necessary condition of moral growth, which is the only good. The demand for a world purged of all pain and sin is really a demand for a sphere where "Time brings no hope, no fear," a world of a neutral colorless best, with nothing to stir a man's blood or make life a moral adventure. But if evil serve good, it cannot be evil. It is God's servant, rather, sent upon a thankless task, but still a servant. Now all this is clever dialectic, and something subtle in Browning's mind loved the game. If his arguments were illusions too, no matter; they exercised his mind and might exercise ours. So much clear gain then.

But I think Browning's true confidence to lie deeper

than either his happy temperament or his skill at mental fencing. He believed in love too greatly to allow love either flaw or defeat. The enterprises of the soul are too great to be brought to shipwreck. The moral order is too sovereign to be subject to limitation. In this mixed world of ours something must go. Very well, let evil go; you can't lose good. As we shall see in *The Ring and the Book,* the poet was never blind to the sad and searching ways in which love is tested, nor to the concrete foes by which goodness is faced, nor to the enormous cost of the triumph of love. But he sent his philosophy as pioneer down the road which life must take, and sent his song above and beyond his philosophy—which brings us to *Abt Vogler.* I said at the beginning that a creed is none the worse for being brief and singable, though it needs much travail of the soul to make it brief and the certainty of the soul to sing it. We have sought to see a little what combined to give the poet his faith; now for the singing credo, the world repeats.

III

Abt Vogler himself is a solid fact in the history of music, being a flesh-and-blood man of the eighteenth century who founded schools of music and invented a portable organ with an astounding amount of tone in its nine-feet cube, and taught Weber and Meyerbeer. But this is not Browning's *Abt Vogler.* He is simply an occasion and voice for Browning's

passion for music and his sure sense of analogy.

There is no achievement in which there is so moving a suggestion of imponderable creation as in music. Music is not made out of nothing any more than anything else is. It is as distinctly art in obedience to law as Browning's own art, or Guido Reni's either. The mathematician will tell you how his numbered vibrations determine the pitch, and Stradivarius that his skill and his varnish and his rare, grained wood, from sunny mountain sides long since deforested, controlled Paganini's tone. The composer himself knows his laws of harmony and makes a science, and a hard one, of what seems an inspiration.

But there still remains the vast and haunting disproportion between the means and result, as if all the tears of things should be caught in the fugitive vibration of the cello string, and all the courage of all the wars be heard in the fanfare of a trumpet. Then Caesar comes home from Gaul and Roland holds the passes of the Pyrenees, and Napoleon comes back from Austerlitz. Here is a viewless tide to bear the soul to rapture or to pain, a voice to sound all the echoes of old unhappy, far-off things, a magic to weave the diaphanous green of spring through a phrase of Mendelssohn. And as I write this, even though I hear only the now swelling, now fading ghost of music caught out of the wintry dusk, the wonder of it is beyond words.

"Well," says the poet, "the hopes and dreams and passions of men are like that." What are we but receiving stations to catch and voice out of the void the harmonies of the Eternal? But we receive creatively and make the thing we hear. It is there in harmonic vibration, in brass, and wire and wood; ah, yes, but never there unless a man makes it there. He builds his palace of music, and the frozen music of Milan is not more real. He ceases and only the silence is left and memories to bless and burn. For a moment the musician has done this thing—this marvel not of sound but of soul. Can such a labor be undone and lost?

Life is like that—as though earth and sky were keyboard, God the musician, and we but discords and harmonies sounded in stuff and sense, to be lost again in the silence. Can this be true? Is the power a dream, and the passion a fugitive vibration? The heart of all our doubts and fears and hopes is here, and the poet's insight passes through all analogy to a confidence which is the musician's rapture done in verse, the philosophers' conclusions winged with fire, and the finer faith of all the creeds sung at last and timelessly.

Well, it is gone at last, the palace of music I reared;
Gone! and the good tears start, the praises that come too slow;
For one is assured at first, one scarce can say that he feared,
That he even gave it a thought, the gone thing was to go.

Never to be again! But many more of the kind
As good, nay, better perchance: is this your comfort to me?
To me, who must be saved because I cling with my mind
To the same, same self, same love, same God: ay, what was, shall be.

Therefore to whom turn I but to thee, the ineffable Name?
Builder and maker, thou, of houses not made with hands!
What, have fear of change from thee who are ever the same?
Doubt that thy power can fill the heart that thy power expands?
There shall never be one lost good! What was, shall live as before;
The evil is null, is naught, is silence implying sound;
What was good shall be good, with, for evil, so much good more;
On the earth the broken arcs; in the heaven, a perfect round.

All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good shall exist;
Not its semblance, but itself; no beauty, nor good, nor power
Whose voice has gone forth, but each survives for the melodist
When eternity affirms the conception of an hour.
The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too hard,
The passion that left the ground to lose itself in the sky,
Are music sent up to God by the lover and the bard;
Enough that he heard it once: we shall hear it by-and-by.

Here is the answer to Tennyson's lament and Cleon's prophecy of the unfulfilled; the answer to all frustrate purpose and dreams which seem to die. If we have heard the music once we can "Be patient and proud and soberly acquiesce." And though we find only the common chord again, the splendor of that strain will persist to touch with mystic power all the lesser notes of life.

IV

But there is still a note unsounded. All the philosophers to whom we have listened for a little have told us there is no resolution of the problem of evil in man alone. The whole matter is too involved for that. Faith is only a way of laying hold of God, and if God escapes us or does not care, or will not share, then Browning's passion, like Tennyson's lament, will find no answer but the echo of its own cry.

The profoundest persuasion of our own time in this difficult region is the unity of God with man. Man is not the whole of God, but God is the hidden basis of humanity, and there must be a point in which God and man are one, some common sector swept within their intersecting circles, no matter what lies without. And this must be the best of each. God and man cannot meet in marginal things; they must meet in what is truly man and truly God.

This, I suppose, is what the creed makers of the fourth and fifth centuries sought when they denied so fiercely those systems which joined man and God at the edges and across an abyss.

Now for Browning, as for the wise and clear-visioned always, the one point at which God and man meet and merge is love. Here is the one thing —and how pitiful it is to call love a thing—which belongs to both, nay, which is the essence of both. There is in human love, and always, some spark of the divine fire, some freedom from all the irksomeness of self and stain of earth. Love may be entangled in course wrappings, but the spirit of it escapes their taint. Or else it may be, as in Pompilia, "A passion that left the ground, to lose itself in the sky." Or it may be the glowing and disinterested passion of the lovers of men for human well-being, or the scholar's love of truth, or the saint's love of holiness; no matter, it is man's best, and not unfit to meet and merge in the divine or open the gates of clay for God's inflooding. And God is love, or else He is not God.

It would require an analysis for which there is no room here to consider justly Browning's treatment of love. It is his "supreme principle, both of morality and religion." "A life actuated by love is divine, whatever other limitations it may have. Such is the perfection and glory of this emotion, when it

has been translated into a self-conscious motive, and becomes the energy of our intelligent will, that it lifts him who owns it to the sublimest heights of being." [4] It is any love you please, a mother's, Fiftine's to be had for a price at the fair, Caponsacchi's hopeless passion and as pure as hopeless. It is the love of James Lee's wife to take a mere man

> For all, love greatens and glorifies
> Till God's a glow, to the loving eyes
> In what was mere earth before.

It is a woman's last word. It is "The infinite passion, and the pain of finite hearts that yearn."

If love is the common meeting place of God and man, then if God share and save it must be in this field. Salvation is not a transaction, it is a transmutation. It cannot be done for man; it must be done in man. There is no region in which theology, sounding for the depths of the resolution of evil in redemption, has more tragically taken the shallow for the depth than just here. Love must suffer and it must share. But it must suffer on the very field on which the fight was lost, and lay hold of the soul to be saved through its own more than likeness in that soul.

V

Browning faces this too, and *Saul* is his answer. This poem has the same lyric light-filled, passion-touched quality of *Abt Vogler,* and it sings a thing

[4] *Browning as a Philosophical and Religious Teacher,* page 143.

not easily learned. So Hosea found out in his own way, and all the great fellowship who have been taught in some searching school the seeming powerlessness and the unconquerable power of love. It may take a man a long time to learn that, but once he has learned it, it takes him no long time to say it, and a profession of faith like this always has a quenchless fire at the heart of it. We should need to know far more than we do know of Browning's inner life, which, less than most poets, he shared with the public, to know in what ways he attained this supreme insight. It is enough to know that he attained it.

All the setting of *Saul* is too familiar to need retelling. Browning knew his Old and his New Testament and his touch is always sure. He has made a poem of David playing the harp for King Saul to get the King out of some fit of melancholy, and David tells the story. Saul is very deeply sunk and it will need a deal of harping to set his soul on its feet. But David, because he loves the King, will do what he can. He finds the King in the black darkness of his black tent, making the dark still more dark. One by one David plays what airs he knows, the simple tunes the shepherds play as the sheep come to the pen-door, the tune which lures the quail from his mate, the tune the reapers love when the day has been long and the grain heavy and they are tired at night. His music next attunes itself to the music of life, burial music and marriage

music, and the chant of the Levites before the altar —and the answer is only a groan. Next David plays the music of the joy of life and the memories of youth, and now, going well, he plays the praise of the King and the glory of a throne—and the King hardly so much as stirs. He anticipates the verdict of history and how gloriously the King's memory shall be kept—and he has nothing more to play.

He had done his best and out of the sense of the futility of his best he came to know that his best must be tested not by the music, but by the yearning which lay behind it. It is strangely hard to put all this into words—I wonder if anyone has quite succeeded—this sense of the helplessness of love and the persuasion of its strength, held in one searching experience. Love is apparently defeated often enough. Fathers and mothers do not always have their loving way with their children. There is a willfulness to escape love and a power never to hear it at all, a resolution to keep one's own way in despite of love.

If one should undertake to prove this by the "case system," as the social worker says, we should discover cases enough, never fear. And yet all the while, though we see love defeated or denied, forgotten, left behind in some excursion to the far country, we do know, if we happen to be the loving, that it cannot and must not be defeated. It is often, in the supreme experiences of life, all we have left. We have played our little tune and sounded our

graver music; we have commanded, we have appealed, advised, protested, and all in vain. Love is the only thing left, imponderable, often piteous, charged with no seeming force at all, as if one should send a prayer to bring a wandering planet back into its orbit.

But just because love is the last resource it must not fail, or else the whole moral order falls apart and we are left amidst the wreck of things, being beaten exactly on the field of our best. It is no great concern for a man to be beaten on the field of his knowledge, knowledge being a relative thing anyway (so much St. Paul said long ago), or to be defeated in the region of the will—often he should be defeated just there. If his pride suffer or his position, these are the most minor of concerns. But if he be beaten in love, which is his best, and most of all if that love be purely unselfish, then his defeat is ultimate and involves the defeat of an order vaster than himself.

VI

What shall love do then? Acknowledge defeat? Impossible. Love has only one choice, and that is to search its armory and see if it has a weapon not yet used, but the weapon must be love's weapon and the only weapon love has is more love. You may protest, if you please, another kind of love—a love more patient, more wise, more resourceful; and I grant you your protest. But all this is covered in what has already been said. For a love more patient,

more wise, more resourceful is after all only more love. But wait—there is something yet; love has another weapon still—its own power to suffer, the transmutation of itself into its final and finest form. Love can become sacrifice.

Now, when love has become sacrifice, it has become, at least on the resistance side, unconquerable. "He that pays all for all is past all harm." It will always be able to hold the field; though you wound it, its wounds, like the wounds of Milton's angels, will be healed, not by an excess of light, but by an excess of love. The only defeat love can possibly endure is to cease to be love, and when it is determined to maintain itself at any cost to itself nothing can undo it. Love is defeated by pride, or anger, or by some dissolving little love of having its own way, but if love deepen down into sacrifice such things as these cannot reach it. It has become invulnerable. There is, therefore, a sense in which a love like this might stand erect and shining amidst the wreck of worlds, and though everything else were undone and love were left alone, if it were still love, it would hold the field.

So much, then, David began to see, attuned by the rapture of his own music to a supreme understanding. Everything had apparently failed save his love for Saul. If the King were to be won fully back to life, he must be summoned by some other music than the music of David's harpstrings; he must be called back by the music of love itself.

David knew that through one supreme intuition, and then he knew something else—he knew that he had only just begun; he had in himself resources which he had hardly begun to use. He could keep on caring for the King, serving him, waiting, and believing in him. He would be taught wisdom in the treatment of this most difficult case. He would discover new resources in himself, in his song, in his service, and in the end his love would triumph; or else, if not *his* love, a vaster, more patient, more potent love than his.

He considers what he would do for the King if he had the power, though Browning leads him to this conclusion, I confess, through one or two obscure passages. He sees the King wanting a new life altogether, as if the elements which had combined to make the melancholy figure before him had not been perfectly mixed, needing somehow to be undone and put together again in some happier way—a need which most of us share in one fashion or another; and David felt this, also, to be a task needing time. His own love taught him the need of love's reënforcement, but only the reënforcement of love.

Could I help thee, my father, inventing a bliss,
I would add, to that life of the past, both the future and this;
I would give thee now life altogether, as good, ages hence,
As this moment,—had love but the warrant, love's heart to dispense!

He asked himself next, or at least the poet makes him ask, if he dare trust this instinct of love and discover in it creation's law and God's heart. He is compelled to believe he can, for otherwise the creature would surpass the Creator, and something would have issued out of the dumb travail of things which was not there to begin with. This, he concludes, is impossible; he may trust his intuition, what a man would do, God will do; he has read the nature of God out of the book of his own heart. Well, man has always been doing this, you say. But what else can he do? The only question is whether we may trust our own conclusions or not. And life, I think, is the proof of that. There is nothing so sure in science or in any proved domain of human knowledge as the sustaining solidity of the entire spiritual order when we approach it in the proper spirit and trust ourselves to it. If you are minded to be a pragmatist, that is well and good, but by all the tests of pragmatism here is something which works, and what other proof need we demand?

David does not argue it through in any such fashion as this. He sings it out:

> What stops my despair?
> This:—'tis not what man Does which exalts him, but what man Would do!
> See the King—I would help him but cannot, the wishes fall through.

Could I wrestle to raise him from sorrow, grow poor
to enrich,
To fill up his life, starve my own out, I would—knowing
which,
I know that my service is perfect. Oh, speak through
me now!
Would I suffer for him that I love? So wouldst thou—
so wilt thou!
So shall crown thee the topmost, ineffablest, uttermost
crown—
And thy love fill infinitude wholly, nor leave up nor
down
One spot for the creature to stand in! It is by no
breath,
Turn of eye, wave of hand, that salvation joins issue
with death!
As thy Love is discovered almighty, almighty be proved
Thy power, that exists with and for it, of being Beloved!
He who did most, shall bear most; the strongest shall
stand the most weak,
'Tis the weakness in strength, that I cry for! my flesh,
that I seek
In the Godhead! I seek and I find it. O Saul, it
shall be
A Face like my face that receives thee; a Man like to me,
Thou shalt love and be loved by, forever: a Hand like
this hand
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee!
See the Christ stand!

A passage like this needs no comment. It is one of the supreme insights in literature, and is itself, without any help at all, enough to show us how much

the poet had to teach the theologian. *Abt Vogler* and his *Saul* complete each other.

But faith is not finally triumphant in the lyric certainty that nothing good is ever lost, or the rapturous persuasion that evil is only an interlude in the divine music. Nor is love triumphant only in its willingness to suffer and its certainty that God's love will suffer too.

We have left, still, the stark fact of evil itself. If it is a necessary by-product in the divine process, it is a by-product involving the loss of enormously precious material. Creative evolution may reach its end by roads which are strewn with the fragments of discarded experiments, but if God is love He cannot reach His ends by roads which are strewn with the discarded fragments of souls. We human folk may not be as important as we think ourselves to be, but we are too important for that. Something is involved beside ourselves—love is involved, and justice, and moral integrity. There must be, then, some way of dealing with failure, some attendant redemption, and this is love's supreme task. It ceases then to be a rapture and becomes the patient travail of the soul dealing with tangled, actual human conditions. It is, after all, a finer achievement to take a scrap heap and find wealth in it, to take the by-product of a gas retort and find color and perfume in the black waste of it, than to manage the main process. This is as true of the spiritual life as it is of engineering, and we have no basis

for either an unqualified optimism or a triumphant faith until we have found some way of taking the stained and making it clean again, the marred and making it whole again, and of reëstablishing the sovereignty of love where hate has ruled, and the integrities of life where the very centers of noble living have fallen into rot or ruin. This and this alone is redemption, the final test and revelation of faith and love triumphant.

Chapter Five

REDEMPTION—*THE RING AND THE BOOK*

The Ring and the Book is, perhaps, the noblest expression of the redemptive process in all poetry, though this is immediately to read into the poem a purpose the poet never for a moment entertained. He was occasionally the theologian, and often the philosopher, but in *The Ring and the Book* he is the poet rejoicing in the ample exercise of his creative force.

Redemption, in some aspect or another of it, is involved in all drama, whether it be played out on an unseen stage, with thoughts and passions for actors, or in *Hamlet* or *Macbeth,* with doubt and ambition incarnate. Drama always involves some strain of motive, interest or situation carried through antagonistic action to an adequate issue. There must be some involution of love and hate, right and wrong, innocence and villainy—what you please. There ought to be a hero, or, if not a hero, then a victim, or else a hero-victim, and there must be an outcome worthy of the contest and the issues which depend upon it. Those who play out their parts in it are either saved or lost, and how they are saved or lost is the supreme test of the dramatist's insight and

power. His dramatic sense shows through the swift and arresting alternation of his action, his imagination creates his situations, but what happens just before the curtain falls shows whether he can be trusted with the Day of Judgment.

If he is writing a melodrama, virtue is sure to be triumphant and love rewarded in the fifth act. If he is writing a comedy, he saves himself and his characters any consequences at all by turning it all off with a laugh. If he can do no better, he uses some clever trick to cover his retreat or win him a spurious victory. The classics called this the "god from the machine,"—we call it "hokum"—which is one difference between the classics and ourselves. When a dramatist has created a situation for which he can find no other solution, he lets the curtain down on a stage covered with the dead, and calls it tragedy. And his tragedy is sometimes so stupendous as to blind us to his essential failure to finish what he began. Hamlet, alive and pondering and postponing, is true to life, but Shakespeare does not deliver Hamlet from his deep entanglement merely by having him killed.

What has begun in life must therein be continued and ended. Life alone can solve the problems which life sets, and these problems are to be solved veraciously only in terms of moral victory or moral defeat. Moral victory does not necessarily mean happiness, or moral defeat unhappiness. Moral victory does not even mean keeping on living. Ham-

let's tragedy was not in getting killed, but in dying in a way which neither helped to save Denmark or to further justice. Life may be a moral defeat and death a moral victory. Moral victory is secured only in some issue of an entangled situation which justifies the cost and travail of it in the dear-won integrity of the soul. Moral defeat involves the defeat of love, incidentally of justice, and, in some far-off way, of God Himself.

I

We see, then, how the drama of life relates itself particularly to faith and love, being just the way in which they demonstrate their effective sovereignty. But faith and love are only names until they become incarnate in personality and are realized in some actual and transforming experience of an individual soul. This is why redemption is involved in all dramatic action, and the outcome of the action is itself to be tested by a redemption which is not imposed from the outside, but grows from the inside through some new quality of the souls of those thus engaged.

The last twenty years have registered a growing sense of the significance of the portrayals of redemption in literature. Any poem, drama or novel rightly interpreting and illustrating redemption vitalizes and touches with color what otherwise tends to become a formula remote from all reality. No formula, however carefully drawn, has ever reached

the heart of redemption; it must be understood through its saving action in the souls and salvations it redeems. George Stewart has lately assembled, in *Redemption, an Anthology of the Cross,* fugitive poems sung across the centuries, which translate the passionate meaning of the cross into high poetic form. The changed approach to the understanding of redemption which such poems reveal is significant. The early poems are frankly theological, but the later songs go deeper, finding the cross planted in all sacrifice and suffering which have had any saving issue in life. They immeasurably broaden the operation of redemptive love and find some travail of the spirit of God in strange and shadowed places. The war especially intensified this temper, for when the nations themselves are brought to Golgotha there will be amongst them many who for the first time understood the meaning of the Cross.

Now we remember; over here in Flanders—
(It isn't strange to think of You in Flanders)—
This hideous warfare seems to make things clear.
We never thought about You much in England—
But now that we are far away from England—
We have no doubts, we know that You are here.

. . . . . .

We think about You kneeling in the Garden—
(Ah! God! the agony of that dread Garden)—
We know You prayed for us upon the Cross.
If anything could make us glad to hear it—
'Twould be the knowledge that You willed to bear it—
Pain—Death—the uttermost of human loss.

We are far enough from all this now to see a little more clearly what there is of true and what of false in it. War is a bitter cross, and those who share the pain of it should understand the Crucified. But there are other and better ways of teaching men the meaning of the cross, through the sharing of the hurt and passion of it, than crucifying them upon the cross of war. It might be true that the braver and more redemptive thing is not to bear the cross of war, but to bear the cross of ending war.

But these fugitive songs with all their gleam of transient insight are not to be compared to *The Ring and the Book*. By any test you please it is the most massive thing in nineteenth-century English poetry. Browning was about fifty when he wrote it, and it combines in a balanced way those contradictory aspects of his genius which we have already noted. There was a Browning who was by every enduement of contributory forces a poet of absolutely the first class, finding his joy in his song and sure of the judgment of the long years. There was also a Browning of subtle and argumentative mind, with a flair for philosophy and a solid equipment for the exercise of it.

The Browning of before *The Ring and the Book* is substantially the poet. The Browning of after *The Ring and the Book* is too largely the subtle thinker. The Browning of *The Ring and the Book* is both in a noble fusion. I do not say he is always even; he has from time to time provocative lapses

into an obscure dialectic, but he shows besides a gift for lines so simple, so luminous, so lovely as to make them the perpetual possession of all those who love beauty. Those of us who heard Walter Hampden in *Caponsacchi* remember how we waited for the lines we knew were sure to come, and how the wonder of them stilled to silence an audience which was certainly not assembled by the action of the drama.

II

As a tour de force of the creative intellect *The Ring and the Book* is hardly surpassed in any literature; it has an epic quality the more marked because the action itself is so limited. Dante could make an epic of the progress of the soul through hell and purgatory and heaven, but he had the whole of medieval theology and a vast deal of Italian history and his own matchless imagination to draw on, which was material enough for any poet. Homer had twenty years' fighting about the walls of Troy and the jealousies of the high gods of which to make an epic. Milton moved through the more than ample range of John Calvin's scheme of redemption.

But Browning must write *The Ring and the Book* out of an old Roman murder trial, with nothing to help him except his own sure imaginative insight, and no way to get on save to tell over and over, and over again, a tale of which you think you would grow tired if you heard it told once. And yet he manages

all this so as to make every retelling of it drama, insight, revelation. It is as though he were turning in his hand a many-faceted jewel the play of whose color is never twice the same, now white, now rose, now black itself, now a window through which to see celestial reality, and now a window through which to look into hell, and yet always a jewel to be held in your hand. He creates characters as strong and subtly drawn as Shakespeare made Macbeth—Count Guido has a gritty solidity Macbeth does not possess and his villainy comes from a darker level than Iago's—and he does it all largely by letting them reveal themselves, now in one state of mind, now in another, and by playing upon them with cross lights which shine, as it were, from the other characters; or else, in some subtle, clever way, by letting you see them reflected in other characters. And so you see Count Guido from a dozen sides, and the inside too, and when Browning is done with him he is too real to be in the pages of a book at all. He should rather walk out of a crumbling Italian palace and elbow you into the gutter as he went by.

The little, closely written, and not too much faded book from which Browning got this raw material is now in the library of Balliol College under a glass case. I seem to remember how some legalistic and inquiring mind has recently been making investigations of his own into the case, following it as he could through the Roman records. He has dis-

covered Browning to have been by no means legally accurate in his statement of the situation and has published his discovery to the world. Mrs. Orr on the other hand says that Browning dealt justly and exhaustively with the records; at any rate, the purely legalistic mind is no more to be trusted with *The Ring and the Book* than with any other symbol of redemption—even the cross.

Browning never professed to be accurate. He tells us himself how he has embroidered old facts with his imagination and made of them something new, whose truth is to be tested rather by fidelity to the high passions of the soul than the records of the Roman courts.

III

The structure of the story is plain enough, familiar enough too, and needs only the barest retelling. There was in Rome one Pietro Comparini and his wife Violante. They were people of no great consequence, loving to live well and having apparently a life estate in certain properties. If they should have a child the property would become their absolutely, and they might use the principal. Their extravagances get them into debt, and Violante, who has no child nor any hopes of having one, conceives a clever plan. She will tell her husband that the impossible had happened and their union was to be blessed, though somewhat belatedly. She would find a baby somewhere, present it to Pietro, who

seems to have been both simple-minded and credulous, as their own, hoodwink the neighbors and the courts, and go on comfortably. She succeeded in doing all this and Pompilia was the child she found.

Pompilia grows, a shy and lovely girl, till Violante thinks to make a doubtful enterprise finally safe and secure Pompilia a position from which she could not be dislodged, through an advantageous marriage. Count Guido Franceschini, an Italian nobleman quite out at the elbows, is willing enough to take the girl, her beauty and her money. He has nothing at all himself to give; he has been a hanger-on at the Papal Court for years and nothing has come of it. He would go back home again with Pompilia and trade the hope of honor for the tender reality of beauty and the sharp-edged reality of money. And this also is managed.

Pompilia's parents go with her to Aretzo and find the Count's moldy castle the last place in the world in which to spend their declining years. The Count proves a most undesirable son-in-law, and the less said of his relations the better. He goes out of his way to be more disagreeable than he naturally is—a considerable accomplishment—and Pietro and Violante are finally driven back to Rome, leaving Pompilia and her dowry behind. They conceive the plan of getting the dowry back by confessing their fraud. I would not press the legal plausibility of this too far, though doubtless if the money had not been theirs to give the court would order it returned.

Actually getting it out of Guido's hands is another matter.

Just what the Court would do to Pietro and Violante, Browning does not say, that being no consideration of his, but the Comparini forgot Pompilia. The Count had never loved her with anything to be named love, and now he hates her with a properly named hate. If he could drive her into some sort of infidelity he would have in turn a ground of action against her, and so might lose his wife and keep the money, which was exactly what he wanted. There is a period of properly villainous intrigue until Pompilia, for the sake of her unborn child, persuades Caponsacchi to take her to Rome.

They are overtaken in the last stage of the journey by the Count, who prefers the courts to the unwritten law. The judges smile a little, the situation of the priest and the lady being quite consistent with the best traditions of Italian romance; Guido is sent back home to bite his fingernails; Pompilia is sent to a convent, with the chance of getting back to her parents presently. Caponsacchi is given a proper and not too serious reprimand and sent to Cirita Vecchia.

In due season the child is born and Pompilia has a little time of radiant motherhood. Little Gaetano now becomes the one prize Guido needs to win the game, being the heir of the whole contested patrimony. The Count takes a rather modern line. He plans to murder the two Comparini and Pompilia,

who is no longer any use to him, then claim the child and the estate. He manages the murders but not his escape. He is captured, condemned in the Roman Courts, appeals to the Pope through the right of some benefit of clergy he possesses, is condemned by the Pope and put to death. Out of the strands of this not altogether edifying story Browning weaves his song.

IV

His plan is simplicity itself. He will tell the tale and retell it, saturating each narration with the essential mind and soul of the narrator until you have seen it from a dozen points of view, each point of view a revelation of the spirit of the actor, advocate or bystander. When he has done, you wonder twice: first, at the strands of black and white and red which weave the web of any human deed; and, second, at what spectra of light and shade truth is broken into when refracted through the human soul. First, he tells you how he found the book and something about the ring (the book and the ring are both real, though the ring itself belonged to Mrs. Browning), and how he was moved to make a poem of it all; then he gives us the pure, crude facts of the case.

The gossips have their turn next; the half-Rome which favors Guido colors the narration with the dye of his prejudice. The half-Rome to see Pompilia's side dips the facts in another dye. A cynical and clever raconteur tells it to a Roman salon, with a

shrug of the shoulders and a fall of lace over fingers reaching for his snuff box, an eye for the great lady in the margin of the crowd, and a way of making a jest of tragedy. Then Guido, uneasy on his seat—though any seat would be grateful after the rack—makes his own defense. He is a martyr, so he says, to tricky greed and a shameless wantonness. He has been a Saint George spilling a little blood, and taking a touch of the torture irons in riding down the dragon which ruined the sanctity of his home.

Caponsacchi for the first time tells the reader what he is really telling the judges for the second time, the bench being now considerably sobered by what has happened. Pompilia, wounded to death, and miraculously kept alive—so Rome thinks—to tell the story of her life, tells it in singing lines dipped in the tears of things, and with the insight of one beyond the fear of loss or change, to whom heaven has lent the perfect vision of timeless love.

Then, for relief, I think, and to play the part of the clown in any Shakespearean tragedy, yet without the wise and almost lyric fooling of a Touchstone, the lawyers take the case in hand and confuse it with pleading which has no bearing at all upon its justice—or its equity. The Pope next passes it all in review from his station on the top of the world and the verge of eternity. He ends by condemning Guido immediately to death. The condemned now frees his soul again—this time another soul—while his confessors press their crucifixes in

protest against his bitter lips, and the Brothers of Mercy wait outside the door with the more material mercy of God, but dim in the darkness. He goes to his death with a final appeal to Pompilia on lips the crucifix could not soften.

Browning then gathers up the odds and ends of gossip which attend a case which has been the sensation of the day for the Roman "tabloids," if there were any. He wonders a little what became of Gaetano, Pompilia's babe, chaffs the British public a little, and ends, as he began, with an apostrophe to his dead wife.

There are twelve books then. They average two thousand lines apiece, say, twenty-four thousand lines, with six and a half words to the line—one hundred and fixty-six thousand words, a considerable alloy for any body of crude, hard fact. Is it all poetry? By no means. Matthew Arnold maintained a line of Wordsworth's—"a Mr. Wilkinson, a clergyman," to be the worst line in English verse, and I would hopefully enter in the same contest line 117 in *The Ring and the Book*—"print three-fifths, written supplement the rest." "Great poetry," said Mr. Arnold, "is simple, sensuous and passionate." The lines I have quoted are simple enough, but they could hardly be called either sensuous or passionate.

But when Guido tells the Cardinal that

> Plautilla Pucci, your affianced bride,
> Has dust now in the eyes that held the love,

you forgive the poet everything for a single golden line.

No little part of *The Ring and the Book* is what we call pure fooling, but what the Psalmist called "the joy of a strong man to run a race." In music it becomes bravura; in Renaissance art, the jeweled and satined splendor of the marriage feast at Cana, or else the sport of Murillo's angels in a monastery kitchen. In architecture, it is the front of Amiens, or the deep-shadowed portal of the Last Judgment at Bourges; in fiction, it is Victor Hugo's gun carriage running amuck on a ship of the line; in drama, it is Falstaff, or Touchstone, or Puck. Everywhere it is a gift of God and the hallmark of genius.

I think, for our purpose, in any consideration of the whole of *The Ring and the Book* the figure of the cathedral which I have used before is best. You may do anything you please with a cathedral; look for the proud lift of it across old, low houses as you see Chartres from afar, or across kilometers of wheatland, as I used to see Beauvais, while the horizons rolled their drumfire to the pitying summer sky. You may climb among its statue-crowned pinnacles, as at Milan, and look abroad to the changeless snows of the Alps and think of Augustine somewhere in a vanished garden, a millennium and a half ago. Or else, you may read its recitative of patriachs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and Mary and her Son in pictured windows, or watch the day die in a

single rose windows in Rheims while all the kings of France—shadows now themselves—come in with the shadows to their coronation, the Maid of France waiting amongst them, her great task done. You may ponder over tombs of Crusaders, or else a bishop, pillared on lapis lazuli and watching "God made and eaten all day long."

Or else you may consider what all this vast creation was built to shelter—the drama of redemption said and sung and done in age-old liturgy.

This, to end with, I mean to take out of *The Ring and the Book*. The poem permits as many approaches and considerations as Chartres. A literary estimate of it is a task for a specialist and needs exhaustive treatment. Quotation at length is here impossible though it would be richly rewarding. Besides, if one can not go to Chartres to-morrow (though one can read Henry Adams), one can begin to read *The Ring and the Book* again to-morrow, for it also was built to shelter a drama of redemption and the issue of it all is strangely complete. The action of redemption in the poem, like any action of redemption and like war—for redemption is a kind of war—passes through three phases: first, the mobilization of the forces of evil and their offensive; second, the point at which the drive is halted, "they shall not pass here"; and, third, the counter-offensive and victory of redemptive love. Let us follow these through.

V

Browning has first and last a deal to say about evil in the abstract; so does theology, and even law. But evil never exists in the abstract. It is always an aspect of personality made real in concrete situations and needing to be concretely dealt with. Evil is terribly concrete in *The Ring and the Book.* Count Guido would be the perfect villain of a melodrama if Browning's art did not save the poem from the melodramatic through his searching spiritual understanding, for nothing that actually happens in the human soul is ever a melodrama. Browning could easily have massed the wickedness of the evil characters in the poem, branded them with lust and avarice and blood-red anger, as Dante would, and called his task done. On the contrary, it is just beginning for him.

Browning makes the Pope his vehicle for the moral and psychological analysis of his characters. I dare say he would have given a division of the poem to the psycho-analyst if there had been such in his time, but the Pope does just as well and better. His analyses, to be exact, begin with line 397 and end with line 1233, in his monologue; they are marvelously searching pieces of work. He begins with Guido

> midmost blotch of black—
> Discernible in this group of clustered crimes.

Guido has been furnished with proper equipment

for the enterprise of life, but he has always made the wrong choices. He never used his full force in any right direction. Greed was his radical motivation, but he would not even pay an honest price for money. He used his station in life as a counter in a slipper game. He pushed inside the church as far as a layman dared go and became a religious parasite. He believed

> in just the vile of life,
> Low instinct, base pretension, are these truth?

In his marriage, not one permissible impulse moved the man. He was cruel with the subtle cruelty which puts the soul on the rack. He murdered with calculation, and stumbled finally and was caught over a stupidity. Guido claimed himself to be

> One huge and sheer mistake,—whose fault?
> Not mine at least, who did not make myself!

Pompilia, who had good reason to know, agreed with him. Her searching, loving judgment followed the taproot of his perversions down to its deepest planting in the dark mystery of an abnormal nature. The Pope himself, in his last sad commitment to God of a soul he could not reach and shrive, sees that Guido needed to be taken apart and put together anew if even God were to save this sorry specimen of His handiwork.

Then about this center of darkness, of greed and

hate, there is the penumbra of wickedness. The sin of excessive self-centeredness, the sin against love, insensitiveness to truth and beauty, subtle imaginations of evil, a way of taking a flower and treading it into the mire, and the great refusal of Pompilia, which carried everything else with it. There are also the colorless qualities of Pietro and Violante, who

> Slide into the silly crime at unaware,
> Slip back upon the stupid virtue, stay
> Nowhere long enough for being classed . . . .

It is all here, then, white and black and red and gray; foolishness whose crimes are silly and whose virtue is stupid, twisted soul and perverted will, love of hate with hate of love, greed, and passion, and, driving through it all the terrible initiative of perverse willfulness carrying them all toward fateful destinies. Who shall dare to say that the kingdom of evil is a single realm ruled by a single lord?

All this works its way out to the inevitable confusions and tragedies. Redemption includes both judgment and penalty, for it is all done in the realm of moral order. I do not wonder that Augustine, seeing in evil an awesome sovereignty though terrible, and having no place in his faith for any sovereignty save the sovereignty of God, invested evil with the august sanction of a predeterminate and eternal decree. You must allow something to a man who cared enough for God to make His will

victorious, even in moral defeat, and gave him hell, also, for a province of his kingdom.

Browning sees clearly enough how sin, when it has conceived, bringeth forth death, but there are more kinds of death than one. In his clear vision the Comparini, full of wounds and laid out in San Lorenzo for the crowd to see, with candles all about them,

> Beneath the piece
> Of Master Guido Reni, Christ on Cross.

and Pompilia, dead in white loveliness, and Guido beheaded in the place of the people, are only death on the surface.

There is a deeper death, the death of the soul—the loss of man from all his proper relationships, the defeat of life itself. Caponsacchi does not care whether Guido lives or dies; something will happen to him more terrible than death.

> leave Guido all alone.
> Back to the world again . . . .
> . . . . . .
> Not to die so much as slide out of life,
> Pushed by the general horror and common hate
> Low, lower—left o' the very ledge of things,
> I seem to see him catch convulsively
> One by one, at all honest forms of life,
> At reason, order, decency and use—
> To cramp him and get foothold by at least;
> And still they disengage them from his clutch.

"What, are you he, then, had Pompilia once
And so forewent her? Take not up with us."
And thus I see him slowly and surely edged
Off all the table-land whence life upsprings
Aspiring to be immortality. . . .
. . . . . .
out of the ken of God
Or care of man, for ever and ever more.

This is the death with which sin is in travail. Must it be so? Redemption takes its last stand here. "They shall not pass."

VI

In any drama of redemption, or any reality of redemption either, there must be a place where concrete evil meets concrete defeat. It must go no further or the day is lost, and it must find the last barrier it cannot storm in a soul both free and blameless, yet bound to share the sorrow and pain which sin has created. Pompilia in *The Ring and the Book* is exactly the point where evil stops, any evil, all evil. Her story, told slowly, with death reaching for each pause to make it final, is the loveliest piece of sustained writing Browning ever did. Its lines are flowers. You could pluck and wear them in your memory as the Pope would find in Pompilia herself, "My rose, I gather for the breast of God."

But there is more in these two thousand lines than poetry. There is the revelation of a militant purity against which the gates of hell could not

prevail. Nothing reached and stained her central sanctuary. She was free from the taint of her careless father's crime, her mother's pitiful or mercenary earthiness. Her foster mother's stupid tricks left her unspoiled. She escaped Guido's traps through a winged quality of soul. She made a sacrament of a gallant priest's elopement with a married woman. Motherhood to her was what the church dreamed the virgin birth might have been. Against a soul like that sin had no force. There it stopped, and where sin is stopped like that redemption begins. Only the pure in soul can free the entangled.

Somewhere in every drama which moves toward a morally triumphant issue there is a central turning point. That turning point is a personality which shares everything but the fault, forgets and forgives the fault in a shining generosity of love, and so becomes a point of departure for the saving action. And I would pass over all lesser illustrations, either in literature or life, to the one supreme example in Christian faith. The drive of sin broke against the cross of Jesus Christ because, first of all, sin had no dominion over Him. The Verdun of sin was not two pieces of wood, but the stainless soul of one who prayed for those who nailed Him to the wood and spoke to God across the gray desolation of Golgotha as a man speaks to his friend by the fireside.

VII

Redemption begins, continues and ends in the action and reaction of personality. The drama is played out upon the stage of the spirit. After that it lays hold, and changes, as it can, ways and institutions and the general mechanism of life. This is a slow, and often costly process, the redemptive spirit being again and again apparently defeated, or even broken upon the wheels of long-established and hostile orders. The martyrdoms of history belong to this region; they are the by-product of the fight which takes place directly the counter-offensive of redemptive love or wisdom or idealism begins; and, though this is to dismiss an immensity of blood and tears in too slight a phrase, the real strategy of the struggle is underneath or above. The contestants are apparently ill-matched. On one side the solidity of vested interests or pride and power of station, or high and hostile willfulness armed with ponderable weapons; on the other side love raised to the power of sacrifice, with all the sure judgments and far-sighted visions of love, armed seemingly only with the power to suffer.

We have been first and last strangely blind to that power. It has a terrible offensive. It breaks down the morale of the opposing forces and creates revolutions and disturbances which are themselves redemptive behind their lines. Saul sees the light in the face of Stephen and is thereafter, though he does

not know it yet, on Stephen's side. The soldier converts the soldier who killed him; the martyr wins his executioner. At last the opposing forces crumple, like a piece of paper in a man's hand, and you do not see until all the smoke and the dust have been blown away by the winds of time what really happened.

Here, I think, in *The Ring and the Book,* is one explanation of Browning's lawyers and judges. They were dealing with a matter the law could neither reach nor understand. The trials were essentially a burlesque of justice. Why not make the pleadings a burlesque too? It was not the church's business, either—the church being what it was then. Browning was a good Christian but he had little use for ecclesiasticized Christianity, and says so more than once with a cutting edge. Here is a case which is God's and love's and Pompilia's case. Let them carry it through. And they do. Guido's last monologue is a triumph of the poet's psychological insight (this is but the second time, I protest, I have used that long-suffering word) and spiritual understanding. Pompilia's love and goodness have not only stopped the drive of evil, they have become a shining sword and spear. She herself has suffered greatly in the process and made the adventure which love always has to make, if it be redemptive, into the hidden stronghold of evil. Love does not conduct that campaign save at a price. I can easily understand how the old creed makers put "He descended

into hell" into their creed. Love has sometimes no choice but to descend into hell, but always to win back those whom hell holds. Pompilia carried all against her, position by position. Caponsacchi, Violante, Pietro, the nuns, the judges, the Pope—she has won them all, and made them, through some recasting of their souls, citizens of the order to which she is native. Guido alone is left. Can she win Guido?

He strips his soul bare in hates and blasphemies and pitiful boastings. He is fighting the law, the church, fate, life, God, and yet always he is fighting Pompilia, Redemptive Love. One feels the deepening intensity of this strife, the more than fateful significance of the issue. Something more is involved here than these two: Pompilia and Guido have become the protagonists in a strife as old as time, as vast as humanity, as high as God, as deep as hell. It is like another struggle on a hill outside Jerusalem. You see through the murk of it, reaching back and up, the serried ranks, shining or shadowed, of the forces involved.

But however Guido turned or thrust, Pompilia is always just beyond the point of his sword, driving in with the counter-thrust of her stainless and patient love, her revelation of something eternal, her piteous forgiveness, her invulnerable power to suffer. Because he cannot escape her he will reject her so much the more. It is not in him, he says, to unhate his hates. He uses his last strength

to strike once more
Old Pietro in the wine-house-gossip-face,

and grows

one gorge
To loathingly reject Pompilia's pale poison.

The Pope had seen through Guido and knew that it would take some sharp stabbing, even the stabbing of death itself, to wake what was spiritually dead in him. He therefore condemned him to death the more confidently—since in the instant of death Guido might at last come to see, though the lightning flash which gave him moral vision slew him at the same time.

For the main criminal I have no hope
Except in such a suddenness of fate.
I stood at Naples once, a night so dark
I could have scarce conjectured there was earth
Anywhere, sky or sea or world at all:
But the night's black was burst through by a blaze—
Thunder struck blow on blow, earth groaned and bore,
Through her whole length of mountain visible;
There lay the city thick and plain with spires,
And, like a ghost disshrouded, white the sea.
So may the truth be flashed out by one blow,
And Guido see, one instant, and be saved.
Else I avert my face, nor follow him
Into that sad obscure sequestered state
Where God unmakes but to remake the soul
He else made first in vain; which must not be.

The time for the truth to be flashed by one blow is almost come. Guido has not finished cursing Pompilia, when there are lights outside the door and steps on the stair. The end is near. Love has sixty seconds in which to triumph, and sixty seconds are enough. In one of the great climaxes of literature, in one of the great insights of all moral interpretation, love breaks down the last defense, and the cry of surrender is wrung from the lips of Guido:

> Hold me from them! I am yours,
> I am the Granduke's,—no, I am the Pope's!
> Abate,—Cardinal,—Christ,—Maria,—God, . . .
> Pompilia, will you let them murder me?

There is nothing to add to a passage like that, save our own understanding. The splendor of it is in its vast and kindling suggestion, as if here were a nebula to be wrought through our own brooding into ordered and shining system. Redemption is too great a thing to put into a line or a lecture. It may need not only God's years but God's eternity, but redemption comes down, or up, just the road which Browning has traced through all this poem. It passes across the hill of the cross; it is never complete till the cross has conquered. After that, though it be but the dawn, the dawn itself is the promise of the splendor of the day to come.

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